PROPHETIC PREACHING IN MODERN AMERICA

John Compton Leffler

Library of the
Church Divinity School
of the Pacific

No. 16401 Class ZT L493
Ex Dono Author
Date 1939

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025 with funding from
Graduate Theological Union

https://archive.org/details/propheticpreachi00unse

PROPHETIC PREACHING IN MODERN AMERICA

b y

John Compton Leffler

B.S., Wesleyan University, 1921

A THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

BACHELOR OF DIVINITY

in the

DEPARTMENT OF HOMILETICS

CHURCH DIVINITY SCHOOL OF THE PACIFIC

Berkeley, California

May, 1939...

CHURCH DIVINITY SCHOOL of the PACIFIC LIBRARY

APPROVED:

Advisor

Henry H. Shires

Dean

Filed: May 12, 1939 H. M. Shires
Date Librarian

GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION LIBRARY 1962

ZT
L493

C O N T E N T S

16401

CONTENTS

Page

Fore Word IV

PART I: INTRODUCTION
The Nature of Prophetic Preaching 1.

PART II: CONTEMPORARY PREACHING

Chapter I: Reformed Judaism:
Abba Hillel Silver 10.

Chapter II: Roman Catholicism:
John A. Ryan 22.

Chapter III: Prophetic Scholarship:
Reinhold Niebuhr 37.

Chapter IV: Liberal Protestantism:
Ernest Fremont Tittle 51.

Chapter V: Anglicanism: Edward L.
Parsons 69.

PART III: CONCLUSION.
The Character of Modern Prophecy 82.

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 91.

FORE-WORD

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the nature of Prophetic Preaching as exemplified in the message of five representative contemporary preachers of America; and to evaluate the essential elements of true prophecy to be found in their message.

PART I

INTRODUCTION

THE NATURE OF PROPHETIC PREACHING

PART I: INTRODUCTION

THE NATURE OF PROPHECY

Not the least of the good by-products of the critical study of the Bible, is the recovery of the true significance of the Old Testament prophets. The discovery that these preachers of long ago were men, not automatons, who were called upon to face life with God-given intelligence, insight, and imagination, has given them and their message a vital significance for present day preaching.

When we see the prophets as products of their peculiar environment, daring to proclaim the message of God in terms of the real world in which they lived, we discover the contemporary quality in all great preaching.[1] It was "in the year that king Uzziah died", that Isaiah heard the call. That date and the historical situation gathered around that event give us the clue to Isaiah's message. For true prophecy is the daring ability to see a contemporary situation against the background of God's eternal purpose. As Dean Sperry puts it: "Sermons are not preached to a motionless world. They are preached to men and women who are on the march".[2] It is into the swiftly moving stream of events that the preacher must plunge, if his sermons are to have life and power.

The clearest example of this interplay of contemporary events and God's eternal purpose, is to be found in the prophetic ministry of Jesus. Steeped though he was in the great tradition of prophetic teaching, there is nothing antiquated in His approach to the life situations which his hearers were facing. How often he quotes scripture only to go on to some new slant on things which is as fresh as the dawn. Jesus was not content to let

---

(1) Isaiah 6:1
(2) Sperry: We Prophesy In Part - preface, page V.

Moses and the prophets do the work which God had sent Him to do. That is why He "spoke with authority and not as the scribes," and that is part, at least, of what He meant when He said, "Greater works than these works of mine shall ye do". The only excuse for preaching is the need for that sort of freshness and originality of insight, as the stream of events moves on. It is always the business of a prophetic ministry to be contemporary in the finest sense of that word.

Yet, in spite of the peculiar, transitory, and contemporary elements in prophetic preaching there are always certain characteristics which are the same wherever and whenever a prophetic voice is raised to proclaim "the word of the Lord".

In the first place, the true prophet is always greatly concerned with sin. Here we come to grips with the seeming pessimism and foretaste of doom which is so often a part of prophetic preaching. Why is the prophet concerned with sin? It is not because he is an instinctive gloom-monger; nor yet because he is a religious sadist taking delight in making people writhe and squirm. That sort is a false prophet, not a real prophet. The prophet is concerned with sin because he, more than ordinary men, sees the awful contrast between the world and man as God meant them to be and the world and man as they really are. It is his very idealism which makes him so acutely aware of sin. The intensity of his vision of that which is ineffably holy is the measure of his awareness of that which is not holy. The absolute prerequisite of a prophetic ministry is a deep and growing sense of the righteouness, holiness and love of God. It was when Isaiah, worshipping in the Temple, "saw the Lord, high and lifted up"[3] and heard the cherubim and seraphim singing the Tersanctus, that the call came. His first response to that call was the instinctive response of any sensitive soul; "I am a man of unclean lips", Isaiah cried.[4] That cry of the prophet

---

3 Isaiah 6:1

at the moment of his call; that sense of his own personal share in the sins of his own day; that initial grappling with his own share of guilt, qualified him to grapple with his nation's sins. A preacher is not a prophet when he sits in smug and superior judgment upon wayward men and a lost world. He is a prophet only when the weight of all that sin falls upon his own soul.

Again we find in Jesus this completeness of identification of himself with a sinning world. All aside from any theological theories of the atonement there is in the gospels a clear indication of that self-identification of Jesus with the sinner. The Sinless One becomes, for man's sake, the sharer in his guilt and shame. When the adulteress was brought to him to be condemned, He somehow took upon himself the guilt of that poor woman's soul and body. He did that even with those sinners who tried His patience most - the smug, narrow, vindictive, proud Pharisees. For when from Olive's height he looked down upon the proud city of Jerusalem and cried: "O Jerusalem, thou that stonest the prophets and killest those that are sent unto thee",[5] we see the wrung heart of a loyal Jew bearing within His own self the sin of His nation's pride and blindness.

A second characteristic of prophetic preaching in any age is its claim to a moral and religious absoluteness. Here we strike a balance to the contemporary nature of prophetic preaching mentioned at the beginning. "If a sermon is to sound the prophetic note", says Dean Sperry, "it must make statements which aspire to be absolute. You cannot descend from that arbitrary level to the lower ground of a comparison of degrees of moral excellence, and retain the quality which makes prophecy what it is".[6]

---

(5) Matthew 23:37
(6) Sperry: We Prophecy in Part - page 37.

The comparative mood of every day life has no place in prophetic preaching. It is always a case of "either - or "; never "both - and". The "Thus saith the Lord" of all true prophecy is a mighty imperative. It cannot countenance well reasoned and nicely calculated comparisons of different shades of grey. It deals with a world in which black and white, darkness and light, sin and righteousness are set distinctly one against the other. The prophet cuts through the finely interwoven strands of good and evil which make up the fabric of life, and reveals each in its distinct character.

This is at once the great strength and the great weakness of prophetic preaching. It is its strength in so far as it enables the preacher to isolate the evil with which he wants to deal. The prophet is in many respects like the research scientist who rules out all extraneous matter and concentrates on the specific object of his research. There is a great value in concentration upon the specific problem in mind. Amos, for example, gains his mighty moral power from directing his message solely at the injustice and profligacy of the ruling classes in Israel. No doubt there was plenty wrong with the common people. No doubt there were values in the elaborate ritual of the Samaritan shrines. It is questionable as to whether all the wealthy and prosperous were as bad as Amos makes them out to be. But no one can deny that the effectiveness of his message rests upon his refusal to see anything but the gross evils which have stirred his soul to a holy wrath.

Yet all this is equally a measure of the weakness inherent in prophetic absolutism. There is always the danger of over-simplification of the problem, and over-emphasis upon the evils with which the prophet is concerned. It is right at this point that the prophet can so easily give in to the excesses of the reformer; hewing to the line of his pet obsessions

and failing to "give the devil his due". Things are seldom as unrelievedly bad as the reformer thinks they are; and often he misses the good in any situation because of his over-concern with the bad.

It is at this very weakness, in all prophetic preaching that the Christian Church struck, perhaps unconsciously, in its formative years. Christianty took over all that was best in the prophetic tradition, but Christian prophecy is marked by a distinct difference from that of the Hebrews.

Whereas the Hebrew prophet was a lonely figure; a layman endowed with no credentials of organized religion; an individualist whose message was unchecked by any social group of which he was a part - the Christian prophet was subjected in the formative years of the Church to a scrutiny on the part of the Church which was more complete than any scrutiny given to his Hebrew predecessors. To quote Dean Sperry again, "The prophet is no longer accepted on his own recognizance, the burden of proof is on him. He must make good his claim to be the spokesman of God, possessed or inspired by the Holy Spirit. His words are heard and laid on the table".[7] Furthermore, there is to be found in the attitude of St. Paul and others of the New Testament writers, a new distinction between those of their words which they believed to be inspired utterances and those which were mere personal opinions. The Great Apostle constantly urges his people to judge the words which he and others speak, whether they be of God or not. He speaks of being among them "in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling". And in the 14th Chapter of First Corinthians, verses 29 to 33, he has some advise to give on the whole matter of prophecy: "Let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discern. But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence. For ye all can prophecy

(7) Sperry: We Prophecy in Part - page 61.

one by one, that all may learn and all may be comforted. The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets; for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace". In other words, there was in the prophetic ministry of the early Church a rigid self-discipline, prompted by each man's responsibility for bearing his share of the good news of Jesus. The Old Testament prophet frequently felt a sense of inadequancy due to youth, inexperience, or obscurity. But he never doubted that his spoken words were all of them direct inspiration from the living God. Thanks to St. Paul, the Christian prophet has never felt warranted in the conclusion that his every utterance is inspired. Even the infallible Pope of the Roman Church is required to make a distinction between his ex cathedra utterances and his occasional utterances of personal opinion, and it is interesting to note that not once since the dogma of Papal Infallibility was promulgated has the Holy Father exercised the right and authority thereby granted.

The absolutism of prophetic preaching is also saved from the weakness inherent in it by the intensified element of Hope which received a new impetus in the Christian gospel. The Old Testament prophets believed profoundly in the ultimate dawning of a better day, but the Hope of the New Testament is something more than a future expectation, it is also a present reality. The new day has already dawned since the Incarnate God came to take man's nature upon Him in the person of Jesus Christ. The Christian preacher has an advantage over his predecessors. He still looks for the Kingdom whose builder and maker is God; he still wrestles with the evil inherent in man's life; but he can never descend to the same depths of gloom the prophets felt because he has before him the record of that New Life which came into the world with Jesus. Not even the gloomiest preachers in the centuries of Christian preaching, have been able to escape completely the Hope that is in Christ Jesus. Sometimes they have

sounded more like the Old Testament prophets than like St. Paul and the Apostles. Sometimes pessimism has laid its cold hand too heavily upon their souls. But at length the radiance of Christ has shown through the gloom to give light and joy and hope to a weary age. There, must be, for the true preacher of Christ, an absolutism of Hope as well as an absolutism of doom.

So, when we consider certain prophetic voices which are raised with power in modern America, we find a similarity and a difference between them and their orginal Old Testament predecessors. Like the ancient prophets they are vitally interested in the contemporary world to which their message is addressed; and like them, also, the main burden of their message is directed at some specific problem confronting the moral and spiritual forces of the world. These present day preachers are also greatly concerned with sin - individual and social - and approach the evils inherent in our common life from the standpoint of the eternal purposes of God. But, unlike their Old Testament prototypes, these American preachers with but one exception all occupy some official relationship to an existing ecclesiastical organization. And as such they undergone the discipline of their respective groups in a manner undreamed by the Hebrew prophets. Only in the case of Rheinhold Niebuhr has there been the relative freedom from that group discipline which the regular ministry of a church provides. Each stands out in that group life of which he is a part, as a dynamic personality who has gained a hearing by the power of his own spiritual authority. These stand in the legitimate line of those great preachers of the past for whom the peculiar religious climate of America has provided an exceptional opportunity. For in America, more than anywhere else in the modern world, the prophet has been given a place of importance in religious life. We

have no established church with its inevitable conservatism and emphasis upon the priestly office of the ministry. Furthermore, in a free democracy men are used to listening to the spoken word of many different voices. As a consequence, the pulpit looms larger in America than the altar. Even the Roman Church puts a greater emphasis upon preaching in the United States than it does anywhere else. As Dean Sperry says: "The American preacher, standing in the prophetic tradition and finding his instinct for prophecy reinforced by three-hundred years of American individualism, has always spoken directly to the work-a-day life of his people. Like his prophetic predecessors, he has been an intermeddler in their worldly affairs".[8] This is true not alone of these well-known voices, but also of thousands of lesser men who in obscure pulpits and before humble congregations are seeking to grapple with human problems in the spirit of the living God.

In selecting these five representative modern prophets, I have in mind the following considerations:

First, a desire to select representatives of the different religious currents which compose the stream of moral and spiritual life in America. To do that it has been necessary to go outside the Christian tradition in one instance, and study the preaching of a representative Jewish Rabbi. For the rest, I have selected a liberal Protestant, a Roman Catholic, an Anglican, and the outstanding prophetic scholar of our times.

Second, for purposes of more careful study I have selected those whose work is most adequately available in printed form. There are others, no doubt, in each of the above categories who are equally effective in personality, power, and insight, but whose message is not as readily available in print.

---

[8] Sperry: We Prophesy in Part. Page 84.

Finally, I have tried to keep in mind in my examples of modern preachers, that variety of emphasis which always has characterized true prophecy. While each of these is preaching to the same world, each sees that world through the eyes of his own personality, experience, and background. It is this inevitable variety which is, at once, the glory and the effectiveness of great preaching.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

REFORMED JUDAISM: ABBA HILLEL SILVER

CHAPTER I

REFORMED JUDAISM: ABBA HILLEL SILVER

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of the modern reform movement within Judaism is the recovery of the place of the prophet in Jewish religious life. The grip of the teacher and the legalist upon Judaism, already firmly fixed before the time of Jesus, became absolute following the complete dispersion of the second century A.D. Through the centuries the schools of the Rabbis held their persecuted groups together by unwavering adherence to the ancient rabbinical teachings and law. Certain outstanding rabbis of genius and insight added their contributions to that body of literature which was the product of the synagogue, but nowhere from the time of Jesus until the reform movement beginning in the 18th Century, was there a place for preaching in Jewish worship. And nowhere has the ancient and glorious tradition of Hebrew prophecy been more amply and vitally recovered than in the Reformed Synagogues of America. In fact, some of the best preaching of today is to be heard in Jewish synagogues.

For this reason, it is impossible to begin this study of contemporary prophecy without considering the message of one of the outstanding Jewish preachers of our times. There are many from whom we might choose - more perhaps in proportion to the number of congregations than in any Christian body - but for the purpose of this study I have chosen Abba Hillel Silver, the distinguished Rabbi of the Temple in Cleveland.

Before considering the message of this great preacher, it is necessary to understand something of the viewpoint of the Reformed Judaism which constitutes the background of his message. We need to remember that the synagogues of Judaism are congregationally governed. There is no supreme governing body of the Jewish Church corresponding to our own General Convention, and as a consequence it is difficult to say with complete certainty what Reformed Judaism does stand for. However, there are certain convictions upon which the reform movement is based.

First, there is the conviction that the Jewish faith has a definite contribution to make to the moral and religious life of our times. The age - old mission of Israel, which was lost in the narrow orthodoxy of the centuries, has been recovered.

Second, there is the conviction that the essence of Judaism lies in the message of the great prophets of the Old Testament; that all the rabbinical studies and teachings of the Law are rooted in the prophetic message; and that Judaism must therefore be not only a teaching faith but a preaching faith in the line of that prophetic tradition.

Third, there is the conviction that Judaism must make itself at home in the cultural life of the modern world, for thus only can be overcome the typical non-Jewish idea of Judaism as an alien tradition.

We turn now to the message of this preacher who stands in that reform tradition whose broad outlines are indicated above.

Like all fine preaching in the prophetic vein, his message has a lot to say about sin. Quite naturally his primary concern is with the

sins of his own people, Israel, and the point at which modern Israel falls short of the glory of God is at the point of its divine mission to the world.

It is interesting to note how persistent has been that sense of mission throughout the long and tragic history of the Jewish people. It is just as strong in the mind of this modern prophet as ever it was in the minds of his Old Testament predecessors.

> "God has covenanted with Israel. The burden of a divine mandate has been placed upon him. He is to be the servant of God. His mission is to be 'a light unto the nations, to open the blind eyes to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house'."[1]

One can not overemphasize the paramount importance of this sense of mission in the message of Reformed Judaism. It marks the fundamental difference between the Reformed and Orthodox faith. Orthodoxy was not interested in proclaiming the moral and spiritual insights of Israel to the world. Driven by persecution into the isolation of the ghetto, faith became a wall which shut out the world. Since the world was not interested in Judaism, therefore Judaism cared nothing for the world. It wished only to be let alone.

The reform movement attempts to break down that wall. Israel's covenant with God is not to be fulfilled in splendid isolation, but in taking his place in the life of the world. But by Israel is meant the whole people of Israel not the individual Jew. Israel as a spiritual nation has this mission to perform.

1
Silver: Religion in a Changing World, P. 109.

Therefore, while recognizing the dangers inherent in the fact that a universal religion tends to become localized and absorbed into the peculiar patterns of differing cultural groups,[2] Dr. Silver none-the-less welcomes and glories in the abiding bond between Judaism as a religion, and the Jews as a people. He does not apologize for the "peculiarities" of his people. One catches something of the same proud spirit of another Jew, St. Paul, in these words:

> "I am Hebrew, not Anglo-Saxon. I never will be anything else. I do not wish to take on, as protective coloration, the manners, attitudes, and points of view of Anglo-Saxon, Teuton, Gaul or Slav ... I wish to be myself".[3]

Such a desire to be all that is finest in Judaism is, however, not due to stubborn pride and egoistic perversity. The reason for his insistence upon remaining faithful to Israel as well as to God lies deep in the prophetic tradition. Referring to the period of the prophets, he says:

> For the first time in the history of mankind a whole people conceived of itself as having been consecrated into an everlasting priesthood and as having been commissioned to perform those functions which among other peoples were relegated to a small official group of priests".[4]

In the light of that "mass ordination of a whole people" which is the essential tradition of Israel, it becomes in the mind of a loyal Jew, no idle boast when he asserts his own Jewishness, and the importance of maintaining the integrity of Israel as a nation and people.

2
loc. sit.
3
Op. cit. P. 122
4
Silver: The Democratic Impulse in Jewish History. P. 23.

> "These sentiments were employed not to impress the Gentile world but to call forth the utmost devotion on the part of the Jew, to remind him of his calling, to challenge him to prove himself worthy of the role assigned to him by God, and to strengthen his morale whenever his ministry made him'. Despised and forsaken of men'".[5]

It is not hard to see, in view of the Rabbi's intense devotion to the ideal of Israel's mission, how the sins of his people which arouse him most are those of what he calls "the modern Sadducee." The slogan of the Sadduceein any age is: "Let us too be like all other people", which is the very opposite of the prophetic exhortation: "Israel is a people that shall dwell alone and shall not be conceived of like other peoples".[6] Like other Rabbis of the reformed faith, Rabbi Silver reserves some of his most pointed words for those Jews who would seek to be assimilated into the surrounding Gentile culture. He is opposed to inter-marriage with Gentiles. He would be ashamed of those Jews who seek to hide their identity behind assumed names. But,it is not the preservation of Jewish culture and Jewish uniqueness which concerns him as such. For him the preservation of Israel as a peculiar people has only one purpose; that they may fulfill their mission to the world. And with equal insight he stresses the point that neither racial nor cultural integrity can stand up against the tendancy to assimilation unless the Jew maintains his religious faith. Without that sense of deep and profound consecration to the covenanted task of Israel, Israel can not survive as a race or a culture nor Judaism survive as a religion.

---

5 Op. cit. P. 27.

6 Op. cit. P. 28.

"The Jew persisted in racial uniqueness in order to preserve the integrity of his faith. Loyalty to the faith spelled loyalty to the race. Thus when the American Jew will abandon his faith he will swiftly and surely assimilate".[7]

On first thought, such an attempt to preserve the integrity of Israel as a race and nation would seem to deny the sense of mission to the world, and would seem to raise again that wall of isolation which the reform movement seeks to breakdown. In a sense, that impression would seem to be correct. If one can not embrace Judaism without becoming a Jew; if Judaism as a faith is inseparable from Israel as a race and culture, there is, then, a wall between Jew and Gentile.

However, in another sense, that is not true. The traditional Christian idea that the individual Christian has no mission apart from the Church to which he belongs is the same identical thing as that which we are considering. The world is not going to be saved by the free-lance individualist apart from the supporting group. Judaism identifies that group in a racial and national integrity. To the Christian that would seem to be an inadequate ground for solidarity, and so it is. But it is a natural ground and also an inevitable ground, even for Christianity. Christianity itself has never been as supra-national and supra-racial as its Founder meant it to be.[8] Our faith is a mixture of the bonds of earth and heaven, and at least the nation and people of Israel is a spiritual entity, not a material one seeking to aggrandize to itself by material weapons of force and blood shed. Pharisaic Judaism may have "turned sharply from primitive Christianity

---

7
Op. cit. P. 39

8
Reference to the national and racial aspects of Anglicanism, Lutheranism, and other state churches.

largely because the latter, while seeking to continue, in its own way, the Messianic world-mission of Israel broke away from the tradition of national discipline and loyalty".[9] But certainly Christianity never succeeded completely in breaking its bonds with racial and national cultures.

Important though the short-comings of Judaism may be to a rabbi, he cannot fail to direct his attention also to the short-comings of the society to which the Jews have their mission. There are for the rabbi as for the Christian minister two fronts upon which his attention must be centered if his preaching is to have effective power. Those fronts are the Church and the world. For that reason, Rabbi Silver does not confine his prophetic insight solely to Judaism. Like other preachers of the modern age, he is vitally concerned with the evils in the social environment of our times. In this respect he has the great precedent of his ancient forebears. Furthermore, it is at this point where the Jewish preacher finds himself inevitably on common ground with the liberal Christian preacher who is confronted with the same necessity. It is this concern for the world which saves Jewish liberalism from the narrow exclusiveness of Jewish orthodoxy. And it is this concern which makes current Jewish preaching so mightily effective and important.

Take the matter of the relationship between Church and State. Since in his book "Religion and a Changing World", Dr. Silver is speaking to Jew and Gentile alike, he uses the term "Church" to describe both Church and Synagogue. No Christian

---

[9] Silver: The Democratic Impulse in Jewish History, P. 29.

preacher could make a more effective case for the independence of the Church from the control of the State and for the Church's right to criticize the State.

He considers the usurping power of the State to be a growing menance to the human soul. "One of the major social problems of all time" he says, "is how to insure the fullest expression of the individual without destroying the necessary political organism - the State."[10] Like every other true liberal, Dr. Silver sees the state as a means to the good life for its citizens, not as an end in itself. He might even para-phrase Jesus' words and say the State was made for man, not man for the State. However, he is realist enough to see that the state always tends, if we are not on our guard, "to encroach upon man's domain, to over-govern him, to enmesh him in laws and regulations, to coerce him into doing things which it piously thinks is for his good".[11]

Rabbi Silver is an ardent believer in democracy as the only form of government which allows for that self-criticism which guards against this tendancy to encroach upon human rights. His belief in democracy is thoroughly grounded in the tradition and history of his race. As he quite clearly points out, the Jew has never taken kindly to any form of autocracy.[12] The ancient kingdom was accepted as a necessary evil, and then not for long. The aristocracy of the priests was constantly resisted and finally done away with. The grip of the mediaeval rabbis was broken by reform. In view of that essentially

---

10
Silver: Religion in a Changing World. P. 131

11
Op. cit. P.132

12
See Silver: The Democratic Impulse in Jewish History, Chapter I.

democratic background the following conclusion is quite obvious.

> "In the face of the increasing pretensions of the state, it behooves the liberal to insist that man possesses certain inalienable rights over which the state has no power whatsoever. There are sovereign rights which are man's own by virtue of his humanity and not by virtue of his citizenship".[13]

Another inevitable corollary of his attitude toward the state is his insistence upon the very pertinent and important fact that "democracy collapses when it is overtaken by war or revolution. One of its primary tasks, therefore, is to make war impossible and revolution unnecessary".[14]

In fact, much of his concern over the evils of war and social injustice arises out of his deep conviction that democracy is the only healthy environment in which religion - all religion may grow and thrive. To make revolution unnecessary he directs his words at social injustice.

> "The religious man will be driven by the dynamics of his faith to a morality of battle and struggle... Oppression and exploitation are more than violations of social laws. They are sacrilege and blasphemy. They thwart God's life in man".[15]

Therefore,"it is the business of the Church to function as the motive power of enthusiasm for all programs of social amelioration".[16] To that end, the Church must "galvanize by education and inspiration the will of men so that they will seek justice and pursue it".[17]

---

13 Silver: Religion in a Changing World. P. 133

14 Op. cit. P. 136

15 Op. cit. P. 55

16 Op. cit. P. 57

17 Op. cit. P. 59

Without taking sides in disputes, and without identifying itself with specific programs and panaceas, it must cry aloud the eternal principles of justice and good-will and lay those principles mightily upon the consciences of its people. We catch something of the spirit of Amos in these words:

> "In the face of these conditions (referring to exploitation in industry, etc.) the Church can not, dare not, remain silent. It must cry aloud. It must lift up its voice like a trumpet to declare unto the people their transgressions. Else its vision is a lying vision and its ritual an abomination".[18]

Of course, the Rabbi realizes where such a prophetic service on the part of the modern preacher may lead.

> "It is not so difficult after all to be a voice crying in the wilderness. It is far more difficult to be a voice - clear and courageous - crying for justice amid the pomp and splendor and costliness of a Temple or a Cathedral which is built and supported by those who must often become the very target of the voices' invective".[19]

The same fresh, vigorous and incisive approach is made by Dr. Silver to the evil of war, the break-down of family-life, and to other phases of evil in modern culture. He is as acutely conscious of the critical situation in which religion finds itself as any Christian prophet of the hour.

It should be clear from this exposition of his message that Abba Hillel Silver is an authentic prophet, if the nature of prophecy is anything like that described in the Introduction.

---

[18] Op. cit. P. 62.

[19] Op. cit. P. 67.

He is contemporary in the highest sense of the word, yet there is in his words nothing tentative, nothing equivocal. He does not temporize with evil, but attacks it with that high degree of directness which characterizes strong preaching in every age. However, the absolutism of his message is saved from excess by the judgment, wisdom, and tradition of the great people to whom he belongs.

It is also checked by the element of optimism and hope which permeates his thinking. The liberal Jew of today is an incurable believer in the evolutionary process by which redemption shall eventually arrive. He has discarded the millenial eschatology of orthodoxy.

He is primarily concerned with making this world the kingdom of God. One brought up in the Christian tradition misses in his message that touch of individual salvation, that longing for the final consummation of earth's struggles in the victorious life of Heaven. But one can not miss the deep insight, moral courage, and spiritual dynamic of true prophecy.

CHAPTER II.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM: JOHN A. RYAN

CHAPTER II.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM: JOHN A. RYAN.

To the average Protestant Christian, prophecy and Roman Catholicism would seem to be quite contradictory.

The reasons for such a feeling are not hard to find.

In the first place, Roman Catholicism does not place that emphasis upon preaching out of which true prophecy usually arises. The devout Romanist does not need a good sermon to justify his attendance at Church. He goes to Church to worship an objective God become really present in the sacrament of the altar. He does not crave to be titillated by powerful oratory. In fact, the injection of the personal views of a preacher breaks the spell of his adoring worship.

In the second place, a religion which depends upon absolute authority as the Roman Church does, is a bit wary of allowing any and every priest to express his own opinions freely. For one thing, his opinions might not represent the position of the Church; for another, they might unsettle the faith of the listener. In other words, the Roman communion has carried to its logical conclusion that weighing of the gift of prophecy by the Christian society which as we noted earlier was an important development in the primitive Church.[1] Since the maintenance of orthodoxy is of primary importance, the freedom of the Roman pulpit is carefully restricted. The Catholic Church does not carry this

---

[1] See Introduction 5-f

restriction quite as far as Christian Science does with its "boiler-plate" lectures, but it does not permit indiscriminate sounding off from its pulpits.

For these two reasons, preaching has become a specialized task in the Roman Church. Only those who have shown marked gifts and a willingness to be bound by the position of the Church, are granted the right of prophesying. In a sense, this strategy is remarkably sound. It guarantees a unified approach on the part of all those who proclaim the Catholic faith. It protects her congregations from the mediocrity and pseudo-profundity which characterizes unlicensed sectarian preaching. The parish priest does not pose as a prophet. His sermons are homilies of instruction. His exhortations are based upon the authority of the Church, not on his own. He is a priest, not a preacher. He is a conserver of the past, rather than a seer of the future.

But among that select group of those who have been entrusted with the specialized privilege of preaching, there are to be found true prophets of the living God. The Paulist order is a preaching order, for example. Its members are among the finest speakers before the modern world. Other of the orders of the Church have developed preachers whose entire time is spent on those preaching missions which occur with a degree of regularity in every parish church.

Furthermore, we need to remember that the Roman Church has always been vitally interested in its relations with the world. Unlike Jewish ortholoxy, Roman orthodoxy is constantly at the job of converting

non-Romans to the faith. It is eagerly zealous at proselytizing. To fulfill its mission it must jump into the thick of the world's life and attempt to do something about it. The whole closely-knit ecclesiastical system is geared to that supreme task.

For that reason, its trusted preachers are constantly at the task of viewing the world from the standpoint of Catholic Christianity. The state, economics, public morality, international ethics are familiar fields to these prophets of Catholicism. Some of the most valuable and rigorous criticism of the evils of our age are to be found in the prophetic utterances of popes such as Leo XIII and Pius XI, and it is presumed that Pius XII will continue that great prophetic tradition.

In addition to papal pronouncement of a prophetic nature, although based upon them, are the prophetic utterances of other Catholic leaders. Perhaps the best known of these modern Catholic prophets is Rt. Rev. Msgr. John A. Ryan, the director of the National Catholic Welfare Council. He is the outstanding exponent in America of the social ethics of Christianity as conceived by the Roman Church, and no discussion of the prophetic nature of modern religion in America can be complete without considering his contribution.

However, before we proceed to that consideration we must note the fact that Msgr. Ryan is a prophetic teacher rather than a prophetic preacher. One misses the warmth and color in his words which are to be found in the message of the others in our study. He is more in the tradition of Ezekiel, than in that of Amos and Isaiah. His insights into the nature of social problems and their cure, have been gained in the class-room rather than the pulpit. Which does not, however, rob those insights of their prophetic nature.

One of the perennial problems which confronts the Roman Church is its relationship with the state. During the height of papal power in the latter middle ages that problem was solved by the rather complete control of the papacy over the peoples of Europe. The popes made kings and emperors and unmade them, often resorting to the age-old tricks of political maneuvering and frequently engaging in armed conflict to enforce their decisions. With the rise of the modern states following the reformation, the Church had to adapt itself to an entirely different situation. Kings and princes no longer followed their own whims. The masses of the people were beginning to stir and to express themselves politically. With the rise of democracy following the American and French revolutions, the Roman Church found itself well-nigh stripped of its former political power. For democracy was, in itself, a phase in the revolt against the domination of the Church. Democracy was anti-clerical because the Church had too completely alligned itself with the dying feudal system.

Consequently, for the past century and a half, the Church has been hard pressed to adapt its ways and thoughts to the democratic environment. That has not been easy, both for the reason of its traditional allignment with the absolutism of feudalism and more important, because the hierarchical system of the Church is itself the most absolute of governments.

It is in America, however, that this necessary adaptation to democracy has had to be pursued most relentlessly. Monsignor Ryan

has directed some of most earnest thought to this subject. In his book "The Catholic Church and the Citizen" he faces it cogently and fearlessly. He calls our attention to the fact that while the Church has always stood on St. Paul's words: "The powers that be are ordained of God", she has never made any official commitment in the matter. However, the canonists and moralists of the middle ages were practically at one in their conviction that no king or ruler had the right to govern unless elected or at least recognized by the people; and the present sentiment of the Church is that "Political authority in general comes from God to the whole community". However "inasmuch as the community is unable to exercise this authority directly, it must transfer the function to one or to a few persons".[2] This concept, it will be seen, makes the acceptance of democracy quite possible for the Romanist. He might point to the fact that the Pope himself rules by no divine right but by election of his peers, and may consequently in theory at least, come from any class, race or nation. It is just possible for the humble American to become President. Both offices have gone to many from the ranks of the unknown.

Dr. Ryan, however, recognizes that the above theory might in fact become the basis for the most unstable of governments if the ruling authority is constantly subject to the whims of the citizens.

---

[2] Ryan: The Catholic Church and the Citizen, P. 14.

He therefore stands squarely for the constitution on which a state is based.

> "The primary source of political authority.. is the existing political constitution. The king, aristocracy or elected representatives 'derive their authority from the fact that it is provided for in the existing constitution. The government may possess or may lack the consent of the people ..... Have rulers the right to continue governing if popular consent is wanting? If they are the only persons capable of providing an adequate government, undoubtedly they have that right. If they are not, they still have a right to govern for such time as necessary' in order to secure a substitute government. [3]

Instead of quoting Papal encyclicals, Dr. Ryan then draws his ammunition from the Declaration of Independence where it is quite explicitly stated that the people have a right to abolish a form of government only when it is destructive of the ends of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". He finds in a democratic form of government, however, a permanent safety-valve in the electoral franchise, although he does not class the right to vote as a natural or God-given right.. "It is created by the state for a civil purpose which might conceivably be attained without universal suffrage".[4]

The whole Catholic position with regard to the state is realistic. The state is necessary to human welfare, whatever form it may take. In America, Monsignor Ryan becomes a proponent of democracy; including the absolute separation of Church and State, and religious toleration for all religions. He refuses to accept the validity of the usual Protestant

---

[3] op. cit., PP. 18, 19

[4] op. cit., P. 91

claim that the Catholic Church desires to become a state church in America. Such a union could be effective only in countries "that are exclusively or almost exclusively Catholic".[5] He even doubts whether there is such a country in the world today.

But Dr. Ryan does insist, what many a Protestant is coming to insist, that"it is an evident truth that the Church is superior to the State because of the superiority of its ends.... the world of eternal and spiritual values".[6] Of course, he is making the Church synonymous with the Kingdom of God upon earth which most Protestants would not be willing to do, but every other prophet in this study would surely agree with the fact that the one ultimate authority is God. It is not the State.

It is also at this point that the Catholic runs squarely against another element in the modern world which it can not accept without protest, and that is the State worship of militant nationalism. Monsignor Ryan quotes several Catholic authorities of Europe saying that nationalism is "the great heresy of our times". Nationalism is heresy from the Catholic viewpoint for the following reasons.

First, the religion of the state tends to usurp for the state an absolute authority over the lives and consciences of its people which it does not have by God's law.

---

5 vide op. cit., P. 32-f.

6 op. cit., P. 34.

Nationalism

> "assumes that the state can do no wrong, and that no individual, nor any social group or any social institution has any rights which the state is bound to respect when they come in conflict with any object which the state sees fit to pursue".[7]

Although he wrote those words before the dictators had reached the zenith of their power, it is obvious that the attitude of the Church comes in conflict with the dictators at this point.

It is interesting to note that the chief point of contention with every state is the education of Catholic children. In fascist states she opposes decrees which give the state a monopoly of education. In democratic states she resists all legislation which tends to the same end, and seeks such legislation as will favor the establishment and maintenance of parochial schools.[8] The conflict over education arises because the Church jealously guards her right to provide the moral and spiritual basis of man's life. She feels, quite rightly, that only such training can provide good citizens for any state.

The second heresy of nationalism is that it tends to undermine the universal mission of Christ.[9] The Monsignor quotes Professor Carlton Hayes at this point: "Nationalism's kingdom is frankly of this world, and its attainment involves tribal selfishness and vainglory, a particularly ignorant and tyrannical intolerance,- and war".[10]

7
op. cit., P. 76

8
op cit., PP. 26, 27, 28; also a discussion of the Church's position on marriage.

9
vide op. cit., P. 75-f.

10
op cit., P. 76, from Carlton Hayes: Essays on Nationalism.

An international Church can not look with equanimity upon the recrudescence of tribal religion in the modern world. Such is a reversion to primitive, pre-Christian conceptions. It violates the Christian conception that "in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek".[11] and that other great word of St. Paul that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the whole earth".[12] However in the past the Catholic Church may have fostered intolerance, that intolerance has never been on a racial basis, with but few exceptions. Therefore, the Church can not accept the modern cults of race, blood and nationality fostered by the all-powerful state. They are contrary to the Word of God, and opposed to the centuries - long tradition of an international Church.

> "Since the members of all races, nations and states are equal in the sight of God, they are all bound together by duties of natural charity. Since they have all been redeemed by the Blood of Christ and called to become adopted sons of God, international charity has been raised to the dignity of a supernatural bond and virtue. It is diametrically opposed to any conception of patriotism which exhibits toward foreign nations an attitude of hatred, contempt, nationalistic superiority or habitual distrust".[13]

This leads us to the third heretical element in nationalism and that is its inevitable tendancy to lead to the destructive chaos of war. The Catholic Church has never taken the extreme pacifist position. Scholastic

---

11
Galatians 3:28
12
Acts 17:26
13
Ryan: The Catholic Church and the Citizen, P. 80.

philosophy, which still determines its thought on this as other matters, holds that the state has a right to enter into war if it is a sovereign power;[14] if it is acting in self-defense; if the rights and interests which the state is defending are of great enough value and importance to offset the recognized evils of war; and if all peaceful means of solving the difficulty have been tried. Monsignor Ryan is realist enough to recognize that the intense nationalism of the modern states makes it almost impossible for any nation to meet all those conditions.[15] Hence the menace of nationalism to the moral law at this point.

The Roman Church insists that groups of individuals are as subject to the moral law of nature and revelation, as are individuals.

> "Since the state is a community of human beings it is as truly subject to the moral law as any private society. Its international conduct affects other human beings.... Hence, the state is bound by the precepts of justice, charity, veracity, and all the other moral rules which govern human relations".[16]

Upon this basis the Church builds its deep concern for peace as reflected in the attitude of recent Popes and in the teaching of her prophets and scholars. Modern warfare is sin because it violates the moral law. By unloosing the tribal vengeance of peoples, nationalism spoils ~~the~~

---

[14] In other words, a section or group within a state is not a sovereign power.

[15] For a full discussion of "The Morality of War"; vide Chapter V, Ryan: International Ethics.

[16] Ryan: International Ethics, P. 9.

the potential unity of the race which was the aim of Christ and is the age-old aim of His Church. "Man is bound by the moral law in every circumstance of life, whether individual, social, or civil".[17] Not even the liberal preacher of the Social Gospel could be more insistent on the bearing of religion upon the whole of human life, than is this Catholic prophet.

This leads us to a brief consideration of one other field of applied Christianity in which Dr. Ryan has made a great contribution - and that is the bearing of Christianity upon the economic life of modern man.

It is well-known to anyone conversant with recent economic thought, that the Catholic Church is on the conservative side in all questions having to do with the economic controversies of our troubled times. She is a bitter foe of communism, a caustic critic of socialism and in herself a major holder of land, wealth and property dependent upon the preservation of the status quo. But the non-Catholic is too apt to forget that the primary concern of the Church is with those large masses of working-people who make up the majority of her members. The Church may be rich, but her members for the most part are not. Nor is it quite fair to assume that her primary objective is to lull her people into meek subservience to the status quo. The encyclicals of Leo XIII and

---

17 op cit., P. 10

Pius XI have placed the Church squarely on record as vitally concerned for justice and charity in the economic life of man, and such men as Monsignor Ryan have built upon the pronouncement of these Popes a rational, forward looking Christian approach to economic problems.

The crux of the matter for the Monsignor is the faulty distribution of wealth in the modern capitalistic economy. He lays down as the Canons of Distributive Justice the following: equality, need, effort and sacrifice, productivity, scarcity and human welfare. Human welfare, which summarizes all the others, and is the end which they all have in mind,

> "requires that all human beings be treated as persons; this is equality..... that all industrial persons receive at least that amount of income which is necessary for decent living and self-development; this is a recognition of efforts and sacrifices. And it gives reasonable recognition to the canons of productivity and scarity". 18

Upon these canons of distributive justice, Monsignor Ryan builds Christianity's demand for that minimum of justice which is a living wage. He defines a living wage as "that which will insure the right to a decent livlihood".[19] Man needs material goods for his livlihood and possesses the right to secure them as a law of nature and morality. He has this right by virtue of three fundamental principles:

---

18 Ryan: Distributive Justice, PP. 220, 221. Passim.

19 op. cit., P. 319

First, "God created the earth for the sustenance of all His children"[20]: Second, "the inherent right of access to the earth is conditioned upon, and becomes actually valid through the expenditure of useful labor"[21]; Third, "the men who are in present control of the opportunities of the earth are obliged to permit reasonable access to these opportunities by persons who are willing to work"[22].

On these grounds, the Church is vitally interested in the cause of labor. Dr. Ryan states quite emphatically that trade unionism is necessary for labor to secure these rights, and that industrial, rather than craft unions are the only organizations capable of protecting those needing it most - the unskilled labor[23]. In fact, he sounds like an authentic prophet, uninhibited by the authority of the Church, when, in pleading for industrial democracy, he uses these words:

> "Our industrial system as now constituted is well-nigh bankrupt. It is fast becoming an industrial feudalism, and the day of feudalism, whether in politics or industry, has gone forever..... What the worker needs is a change of status..... Industrial dependence cannot endure permanently, no matter how well off the worker may be in the material conditions of existence. 'Not by bread alone doth man live'".[24]

---

20 op cit., P. 317
21 op cit., P. 318
22 loc. cit. and passim throughout Chapter XXIII.
23 op cit., PP. 374-378
24 op cit., P. 389

To the person brought up in the Protestant tradition of individualism and independence from an authoritarian Church, many of the conclusions of Monsignor Ryan seem to fall below the standard of prophecy set forth in the Introduction. As noted before, there is an absence of warmth and color; he does not seem to be on fire with the prophetic urgency of "Thus saith the Lord", It is the Church, rather than God, who speaks through him. Consequently, there is a rationalization, a nicely balanced "either-or" in most of his message. It is the moralist, bound by the authority of the Church, who speaks; rather than the prophet.

But if prophecy is concern for the evils and short comings of contemporary society, then Dr. Ryan is a prophet. He has more patience than most prophets posses; but that is because his Church has been at the job of saving the world for a long, long time and has learned that there are no short-cuts. Further, his work indicates that Catholicism is not as inflexible and unchanging as many think it is. Like all organisms that possess vitality it too has its "growing edge" and the man we have been studying is out on that "growing edge" with all of the vigor and incisiveness of his keen mind and deep faith.

CHAPTER III

PROPHETIC SCHOLARSHIP: REINHOLD NIEBUHR

CHAPTER III

PROPHETIC SCHOLARSHIP: REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Compared to the older Churches of England and the Continent, the American Church has produced few outstanding scholars whose thought has influenced the religious life of other lands.

For one thing, American Christianty, like the American people, has been too busy conquering a continent to provide or encourage that settled, quiet, leisurely environment which is the absolute prerequisite of real schclarship. The Anglican and Continental Christian gets a bit out of breath as he views the intense activism of American religious life. And it must be confessed that American Christians get out of breath themselves sometimes.

In the second place, the denominational nature of American religion has tended to discourage the highest type of scholarship. In England or Germany, during the 19th Century there was a unity of life and expression which fostered the undistracted pursuits of scholarship. Whatever controversies there were, arose within the Church and were free from the competitive aspects of our own denominational life. There is always a freedom from that strain, which is so detrimental to scholarship, in the unity of a state church.

In the third place, American Christianity has lacked that age-long tradition of scholarship fostered by the ancient universities

of the old World. The Churches of America were so busy establishing schools that they had little time to use the schools.

Finally, the American churches were confronted with the necessity of weaving into the fabric of the nation's religious life the innumerable strands of Old World tradition and influence. America was not only the melting pot of races and nationalities, she was the melting pot of religion. As a consequence there could not be any representative scholarship of the American church, only of one of the innumerable American churches.

In the past decade, however, there has begun to emerge something more nearly approximate to the tradition of real scholarship. American religion, like the nation, is nearly grown up. Its active adolescence is nearly over, and with that inevitable process is coming the maturity of mind which is another prerequisite of true scholarship. The American churches are slowly but surely becoming a Church, and out of that unity of spirit is coming a scholarship which is truly representative.

It is interesting to note, also, that this representative scholarship is coming increasingly from the one graduate school of Theology which, since the 19th Century, has pioneered in the field of a united protestantism. I refer to Union Seminary in New York. For most of its history Union has borne the brunt of denominational attack from all quarters. It has been accused of being a hot-bed of modernist heresy, and of political and social radicalism. Its graduates have often been looked upon as suspicious characters when they returned to the ministry

of their respective churches.

But today, under the wise leadership of Henry Sloan Coffin, and with the impetus gained from the universal interest in Christian unity, Union Seminary has finally come into its own.

But this modern success would be impossible without the great tradition built up by such men as William Adams Brown and his younger colleague Reinhold Niebuhr. The religious thought of America, in every denomination, has been profoundly effected by the scholarship of such men. And the element in that scholarship which has produced that effect, has been the prophetic element. As we saw in the case of Msgr. Ryan, the class-room and prophecy need not be anti-thetical. But in the case of Reinhold Niebuhr we find, not a teacher who has become a prophet, but a prophet who has become a great thinker and teacher.

The arrival of Niebuhr on the faculty of a non-denominational seminary was well-nigh inevitable. Back in 1916, when minister of Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit he wrote these lines in his note book: "Does'nt this denominational business wear on one's nerves?"[1] The day before a professor had asked him what church he belonged to, and on receiving the answer the professor had promptly pigeon-holed him and walked away. "Perhaps if I belonged to a larger denomination this would'nt irk me so much". Then "I might strut about and claim its glory for myself. If I give myself to religion as a professor I must find some interdenominational outlet for my activities. But what"?[2] That question was answered thirteen years later when he became a member of the faculty at Union.

---

1 Niebuhr: Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, P. 8.

2 loc. cit.

Dr. Niebuhr has been very kind to one who would study his contribution to modern prophecy; not because he has written more books than most prophets find time to write; but because he has given us an intimate, personal record of the making of a prophet in his well-known book "Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic". He has written many books which are more logical, better organized, and perhaps more profound that this one jotted down during thirteen years of a busy and successful ministry and published as he left that ministry to enter the faculty of Union Seminary. But none of his books is more pertinent to this study. In the case of each of the others under consideration, one must perforce confine his study to the message and glean some estimate of the man from that message. In this case, we can come at the message through the self-revelation of the man.

For the above reason, I wish to make a different approach to Reinhold Niebuhr than to any of the others. Also since, there is none of these modern prophets whose work and message is more widely known than his, I want to approach this study from the angle of his contribution to our knowledge of what constitutes a prophet, rather than from the angle of his message. In none other of these studies can the nature of the prophet as outlined in the Introduction be more clearly set forth.

In the first place, we have here a clear indication of the effect of heredity and experience upon the characteristics of a prophet

and his message. If Phillips Brook's oft-quoted statement, "Preaching is truth through personality" [3] be correct, the style, direction, and peculiar quality of a man's message are dependent upon his personal inheritance and experience. Truth is everywhere and always the same. What gives it its many sided appearance is the difference in the media through which that truth is expressed.

Reinhold Niebuhr's contribution to modern prophetic insight can not, therefore, be understood apart from his Germanic blood and Lutheran back-ground. From the first he gets the logical, serious, introspective German mind which makes him not only a thorough student but a critical observer of the human scene. To the true prophet, life is always a serious business, and to the true German life is also a serious business. And it is serious not only because of one's objective observations but because of one's subjective sense of inadequacy.

In spite of the fact that he started with a new parish which he could build more or less to his own liking, we find the young Niebuhr very concerned about his inadequacy toward various aspects of his work. Quite obviously he entered the parish ministry against his preference for the academic life. [4] The pressure of a weekly sermon irked his methodical mind. Like all young preachers (and old ones too!) he found it difficult to produce a great message every Sunday morning at the stroke of the bells and lived in mortal terror of repeating himself. [5] At an early date, he sensed the dilemma every parish preacher is in who aspires to be a prophet. "The prophet speaks only when he is inspired", he writes in 1915.

---

[3] Brooks: Yale Lectures on Preaching, P. 5.

[4] See preface of "Notebook", P. XIV.

[5] Niebuhr: Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, P. 4.

"The parish preacher must speak whether he is inspired or not. I wonder whether it is possible to live on a high enough plane to do that without sinning against the Holy Ghost".[6] One can not escape the conclusion that this feeling, intensified by later experience, was partly responsible for his leaving the parish work. For prophecy, to Niebuhr, is a serious and awful responsibility and to be real and vital can not rest too lightly upon a man's soul, nor can it be ground out the way the Ford Motor Co., grinds out motor cars.

Again, he discovered what every preacher discovers soon or late, that the mood of the study with its calm, analytical, critical atmosphere, is not and can not be the mood of the pulpit. As I noted in the Introduction,[7] real prophecy does not deal with "both-and". It must speak in absolutes or not at all. Niebuhr finally reconciled these contrasting moods of study and pulpit in what would seem to be this sound fashion. "Let the study serve to reveal the relativity of all things so that the pulpit utterances do not become too extravagant, and let the pulpit save the student from sinking in the sea of relativities".[8] Thus was resolved the tension between the scholar and the prophet at this point.

Another thing which troubled him from the first was the tension between a man's natural desire to have his message accepted and the prophet's desire to have his message pertinent to the realities of life. This brings up the questions of freedom in the pulpit; the dangers of popularity; and on the other hand the dangers of a "martyr complex".

---

6 loc. cit.

7 Vide Introduction, P. 4.

8 Niebuhr: Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, P. 38.

On pulpit freedom, he soon decided that "the simplest way to get it was to take it". Apparently he was justified in that assumption, for the liberty he took was largely responsible for the fact that his parish of eighteen families became in thirteen years one of the strongest parishes in Detroit, a city of strong churches. He could never accept the alibi some parsons give for softening their message on the assumption that one is not free to say certain things and hold his job. In 1916 he determined "never to aspire to be a preacher of pretty sermons. I'll keep them rough just to escape the temptation of degenerating into an elocutionist".[10] The latter reason is not the only reason. He has kept his message "rough" because he will not be, in his own mind or another's, a timid, time-serving, trimmer of the Word. From his own experience and from observation of other successful ministers, he has concluded that "privilege and power tend to corrupt the simple Christian heart".[11]

Yet, on the other hand, the scholar in him makes him question that want of common sense which leads some men to suffer martyrdom needlessly. While recognizing that "it is not easy to speak the truth in love without losing part of the truth",[12] he none-the-less deplores the wisdom of those who

> "rush into a congregation which has been fed on the individualistic ethic of Protestantism and is immersed in a civilization where ethical individualism runs riot, and expect to develope a social conscience in two weeks. Nor have you a right to insinuate that they are all hypocrites because they don't see what you see".[13]

---

9 op. cit. P. 29.
10 op cit., P. 9
11 op. cit., P. 45
12 op cit., P. 107
13 loc. cit.

In other words, if a man suffers from a martyr complex and deliberately, and tactlessly refuses to use the more patient role of the teacher in these matters, he has no business in the ministry. Here we find the prophet in the man tempered by the scholar. And also, I believe we discover at least one reason why Niebuhr felt that the place to begin in this matter of developing a social conscience in the Church is in the seminaries where her future leaders are being trained.

It is obvious from the foregoing, that Reinhold Niebuhr by temperament and insight is in the line of the prophets. The prophet's sense of inadequancy: his fear of being a false prophet; and his determination to have his message make a difference in men's attitudes, are all there.

This sense of tension within his own soul makes him singularly qualified to consider in his message the tension which exists in an age of crisis. The comtemporary note in Niebuhr's thinking is provided by the chaos and confusion of a a disillusioned world. Starting his ministry in the hey-day of religious liberalism, he has been driven by the logic of events to a practical repudiation of the shallow optimism and thinly veiled humanism of liberal Protestantism.

The key to this repudiation lies in his reaction to the World War and the Gilded Age which was its aftermath.

> "The moral superficiality of modern culture betrayed the social order because it had not realized that reason may be used much more readily to justify impulse than to check and restrain impulse.... Therefore an age of liberalism, rationalism, and optimism is ushered to its close by a World War which can be distinguished from previous conflicts, chiefly by the effectiveness of its lethal instruments, the universality of its destruction, and the superior plausibility of its various moral justifications". [14]

14
Niebuhr: Reflections on the End of an Era, PP. 16, 17.

Thus is the scholar led to a questioning of the very thing which is his life - Reason.[15] The prophet within him has led him to distrust all of man's attempts to think through the experiences of life. In the last analysis, man walks by faith, and not by sight. "He believes where he cannot prove". But the prophet within him also leads him to be dissatisfied with letting the whole matter rest there. By no stretch of the imagination can Niebuhr be accused of falling into the quiet rut of pietism which rests back upon "justification by faith" while the world goes to the devil. For him the very experience of moral frustation, which is so typical of our age, "is a perennial source of theistic belief."[16] But Christian theism is not a rational belief. It seeks to reconcile, through the use of myth and paradox, "the rational absurdity of conceiving of God as at once the pinnacle and the basis of reality, the goal toward which life is striving and the force by which it strives".[17] Theologians call such a God the transcendent-immanent God. The God who is more than the world, and yet in the world. The God who is the author of history's ultimate goal, and is yet in the inadequacies of any given epoch in history. Quite rightly, Niebuhr claims that such a conception of God can not be expressed rationally. Rationalize immanence and you arrive at pantheism - a God locked up in his creation. Rationalize transcendance and you arrive at a God locked up in a distant heaven.

15
Vide op. cit. Chapters I, II, X, XV, XX.

16
op. cit, p. 200-f.

17
loc. cit.

Overstress immanence as liberal Christianity did and you arrive at the spurious optimism which blinds one to the relativities of human effort. Overstress transcendance as the Barthian does and you dip into that pessimism which sees all of man's efforts as nothing worth. These two contradictory elements in God's nature can be brought together but not by reason. They are united in Christian theism through the poetry and myth of the Bible and through the paradox of the Incarnate Son"crucified also for us". They are united in a sort of permanent unbalance within the Christian world-view.[18]

Thus speaks the scholar. But the prophet in him finds all this terribly relevant to the contemporary scene. Nowhere is that relevance more clearly set forth than his latest book of sermonic essays called: "Beyond Tragedy". There he follows into the pulpit the conclusions arrived at in the study. Since man's greatest need is for security, he finds it.

> "In a true religion, faith in the ultimate meaningfulness of existence, grounded in a God who transcends the caprices and contingencies of the physical order and who is capable of overcoming the chaos created by human sin.... A false religion.... assures man of peace <u>in</u> his sins, not forgiveness of his sins".[19]

The chief sin of man is in his assumption that security is within his grasp and in his efforts to attain it. He craves power and at the moment of securing it he falls into the sins of pride and injustice. "Man is mortal, that is his fate. Man pretends not to be mortal.

---

[18] For a discussion of transcendence vide op cit., pp. 213, 225, 286.

[19] Niebuhr: Beyond Tragedy, P. 19-f.

That is his sin."[20] That is as true of the social group into which man organizes his life as it is of the individual. The modern has given this fundamental weakness a place in his very definition of religion as "the consciousness of our highest social values".[21] It has made us think of capitalism, democracy, scientific materialism, as ends "toward which the whole creation moves". It has given them the status of articles of religious faith. "Nothing could be further from the truth", says Dr. Niebuhr.

> "True religion is a profound uneasiness about our highest social values". Springing 'from the knowledge that God transcends limits of finite man, while this same man is constantly tempted to forget the finiteness of his cultures and civilization and to pretend a finality for them which they do not have."[22]

This fallacy takes acute form in the current worship of the state. All communities tend to self-glorification. Many Americans believe that Christianity and "the American dream" are identical; that democracy is a close approximation to the kingdom of God. Such a conviction, no matter how widely held, must be resisted with all the courage of a prophetic soul. <u>But even then his word will not be believed.</u>[23]

This would seem to lead to an unyielding pessimism about the whole situation. Yet, Niebuhr does not stop there. It is the paradox of the cross which saves man alike from a false optimism and a false despair. The Cross of Christ "is a revelation of what life

---

20 op. cit., P. 28.
21 op. cit., P. 28.
22 op. cit., P. 28.
23 vide op. cit., P. 85.

really is. It is tragic from the standpoint of human striving". But it is also the revelation of "a God who transcends history and is yet in history, who condemns and judges sin and yet suffers with the sinner"[24]..... Compared to the Christ who died upon the Cross, "Jesus, the good man who tells all men to be good, is more solidly historical. But he is the bearer of no more than a pale truism"[25].

But the Cross also is not all. In the resurrection of Christ lies the promise of the redemption of man's nature and in the Christian belief in the Second Coming - in his estimation one of the profoundest myths of the faith -- are expressed two ideas without which unrelieved pessimism would be the outcome of our faith.

> "The two most basic ideas in this hope of the 'parousia' are that the redemption of the world does not require the destruction of creation since creation is not of itself evil, and secondly, that redemption must come from God since every human action remains with the contradictions of sin".[26]

In other words, the Christian hope includes a redeemed earth, a divine society at the end of history, but not in some eternity above history. That redemption will come through God's grace filling up the contradictions and imperfections of man's striving. There is value in the striving - the value inherent in the attempt of man "to skirt the edges of the Infinite". But always man must remember that in all his efforts there is the taint of sin which only the grace of God can erase.[27]

.....

[24] op. cit., P.P. 20, 21

[25] loc. cit., P. 21, also, vide op. cit., Chapter IX.

[26] op. cit., P. 188

[27] For a discussion of the Grace of God vide Niebuhr: Reflections on the End of Era, P.P. 126, and Chapters XV and XX.

I have gone thus in detail into the man and the message because I believe both are the most significant evidence available of the place the intelligent prophet must occupy in our troubled world. Reinhold Niebuhr is accused by his critics of many things; of turning his back on liberalism while using the scholarly techniques of liberalism; of getting so enmeshed in paradox that no one, least of all himself, can work himself out to a consistent faith. But he would be the last man on earth to claim for his conclusions that absoluteness of insight which he knows no man possesses. He is considered by many to be the outstanding scholar of our times. Of the validity of that claim I am not in a position to judge. But there can be little doubt that his words are no soporific to lull a distracted world to sleep. He has succeeded as few men have in maintaining into maturity the ideal of youth. He has certainly succeeded in keeping his vows not to preach "pretty sermons". He has kept them "rough". Too rough for some minds; and too rough for many a conscience.

CHAPTER IV.

LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM: ERNEST FREMONT TITTLE

CHAPTER IV.

LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM: ERNEST FREMONT TITTLE.

One of the thrilling recollections of my seminary days, is the memory of those Sunday mornings when I sat in the crowded gallery of First Methodist Episcopal Church in Evanston, Illinois and listened with eager ears to the preacher who stood so quietly beside his pulpit desk but whose words had a way of holding his audience as few words have ever done.

"First Church" was then a bright, cheery structure with little stained glass - quite definitely not one of those "late William McKinley Churches" that mar the landscape of the East and Middle West - but none-the-less a church in which the pulpit was central to the architectural plan. Which was as it should be - for central to the life of the parish was the message that came from the pulpit each Sunday morning from the lips and heart of Ernest Fremont Tittle.

Dr. Tittle was a young man then in his thirties. He had the strong body of an athlete and the face of a prize-fighter. Well-groomed and graceful, he was however not a "pretty" man. Nor did he preach what his friend Niebuhr would call "pretty" sermons.[1] There was a rough, elemental quality to his message which shone through the smooth flow of language. One still heard rumors of the fundamentalists and millionaires

---

[1] See Chapter III, P. 44.

who had left the church because they could not stand his theological and social radicalism. Be that is it may, there were still plenty left to listen. They swarmed in long before service - some of the remaining millionaires in morning coats, "toppers" and spats; less elegant but prosperous middle-class men and women; teachers and professors; and, in largest numbers, the students of Northwestern University. The two elements in that congregation which struck one most were the number of men and young people; criteria of success in any church at any time.

Like Reinhold Niebuhr, Dr. Tittle is the product of liberal Protestantism. In fact, he enrolled at Union after he had finished at a Methodist seminary in order to overcome the conservatism of the latter. At the time I mention, he was hard at the task of re-thinking the Christian faith in terms of modern knowledge. But as an important part of that re-thinking, there came within his view the manifold social and economic problems of the post-war period. It took courage to buck the rising stream of materialism and prosperity in those days as he did.

The battles of theological liberalism are now past, but the battles of social liberalism are as difficult today as ever. The heresy of the hour is economic and political, not theological. And since it is the nature of prophecy to be called heretical by those who desire, for selfish reasons, to preserve the status quo; it is refreshing to [illegible] that this same man in the same pulpit is still making people [illegible]

DIVINITY SCHOOL LIBRARY

There are at least four environmental elements that enter into the background of the prophetic ministry of Dr. Tittle. First, he is a Methodist by birth and upbringing. He has inherited the spirit of moral absolutism; if not in some respects the letter, that has characterized the followers of John Wesley ever since he asked his lay preachers if they were "going on to perfection".[2] Again, he possesses that evangelical zeal for which Methodism has been noted since the beginning, and the firm conviction that by "the foolishness of preaching" men can be converted to a new way of life. Consequently, he brings to the social implications of the gospel a warmth and personal appeal which is completely lacking in the social message of Monsignor Ryan, for example.

The second element in his environment has been his proximity to student life and thought on two large mid-western campuses.[3] Few men possess the gift of speaking to students because they lack the gift of understanding them. To Dr. Tittle, however, the student group in his congregation offers a constant opportunity to face life with the fresh spontaneity of youth. He thinks about the things they are thinking, he faces their problems and constantly has in mind their equipment for facing the kind of world in which they will have to live.

The third environmental element which has influenced his message is the prosperity and prominence of the people who compose his congregation. Where most men would succumb to such an influence and settle

---

[2] One of the questions asked by Wesley of each preacher at the Annual Conferences over which he presided.

[3] Before coming to Evanston he was pastor in Delaware, Ohio, the seat of Ohio Wesleyan University.

down in a nice, comfortable, safe religion which "lets sleeping dogs lie"; Dr. Tittle has exhibited a constant sense of tension between himself and the subtle temptations of such a parish. The presence of millionaires in his congregation has heightened his concern for the poor; the presence of big executives on his Board of Trustees has made him go out of his way to espouse the cause of labor; the rock-ribbed capitalism of the North Shore, with its consequent economic imperialism, has made him a socialist and a pacifist. Not for one moment should one think this has been easy. It has taken a terrific toll physically and nervously - but he has managed to keep his integrity intact.

The final important environmental element is the post-war world with its orgy of prosperity and its consequent depression; its wars and rumors of wars; and above all its constant and terrific rate of change. In an age of materialism, strife, and chaotic flux this prophet has stood for the eternal verities of the Christian faith.

It would be possible to use several books which he has written as a background for our consideration of his message. But unlike Reinhold Niebuhr, Dr. Tittle is at his best in the pulpit, not on paper. Therefore I shall confine my consideration of his message to several published sermons which have been preached recently from the pulpit of First Church, Evanston.

A prophet's message always takes its color from his conception of God. That is true because the age to which his message is addressed

takes its color from the "power or powers which it conceives as having ultimate control over its interests and destiny". Dr. Tittle does not hesitate to use the strong language of the Old Testament in describing the present world as one which has gone "a-whoring after other gods"[5], than the God of Christian experience and revelation. "It is very important for us to get rid of the idea that the only people who are capable of worshipping 'other Gods' are the so-called heathen of backward lands"[6]. It is possible in Dr. Tittle's mind for the good people who sit before him to "go a-whoring after other gods" and he proceeds to point out what these false gods of the hour may be and often are.

First, there is money. Not that anyone consciously sets out to worship money. The god of wealth is much more subtle than that.

> "To believe that economic motives, and they alone, largely determine human conduct, so that history is but the product of economic forces, is to believe that the power which has ultimate control over man's interests and destiny is a power whose symbol is money".[7]

There you have the prophet laying bare the fallacy in the economic determinism which the sociology professors are giving youth today.

> "To believe that material goods are the greatest gifts of life,...and to seek after them as for nothing else, is to give one's final obedience to a power whose symbol is money".[8]

4
Definition of religion: James B. Pratt: Religious Consciousness, P. 2.

5
Judges 2:17; Also Hosea 4:12, 9:1.

6
First Church Pulpit, Vol. I., No. 1, Sermon on "What is your God? Feb. 7, 1939. P. 4.

7
op cit., PP. 6, 7.

8
loc. cit.

Here the prophet strikes at the smug, comfortable materialism of the well-fed people who listen to him. And his final blow is reserved for those who occupy positions of tremendous power because of their wealth when he says: "To believe that you can do anything with money, if you have enough of it, is to assume that money represents the power from which the highest help may come".[9] He makes the daring and devastating suggestion that the opening verses of St. John's Gospel be rewritten in the following fashion: "In the beginning was Money, and Money was with God, and Money was God..... All things were made through Money, and without it was not anything made that was made". And by the time he finishes with money, one would be either sick with shame or violently angry.

Another false god is the State. Nor does he waste very much time condemning fascism abroad as an example of state worship. He is more concerned with the subtleties of that worship in America where men still pay lip-service to the true God while tending more and more to trust in the state as the ultimate power which rules their interests and destiny. He asks if there are not too many among us for whom "a reference to the New Testament leaves them cold, whereas a reference to the Constitution brings them to their feet in rapt attention".[10] After referring to the American and Church flags which hang side by side in many a chancel

---

9
loc. cit.
10
op. cit., P. 9

he says:

> "How interesting and, probably, how disturbing, it would be to know which of these flags appears the more meaningful and precious to those who behold them or which, by its removal, would create the greater consternation".[11]

Here is no theoretical prophet dealing in lofty principles divorced from common experience. With remarkable genius he puts these things on that level of simplicity which people can understand.

The third false god, which is the inevitable corollary of the other two, is the god of force and violence. The worshipper of Money is drawn irresistably to put his trust in force - such a man may

> "not like the idea of surrending his freedom; but he likes even less the idea of losing the savings of a lifetime. He does not like the idea of sacrificing his children to the demands of a totalitarian state; but he likes even less the idea of slipping down from the upper middle class to the lower middle class and thence, perhaps, into the ranks of the proletariat. So, being thoroughly frightened he makes a god of the state".[12]

Materialism and nationalism go hand in hand. "They set at nought every spiritual value"[13], and then when they strike a difficulty they resort to material force as a means of protecting that which is threatened. When one remembers that is is to the upper middle-class that these words are spoken, one gets the full measure of their significance as a prophetic utterance.

What then is the God men should worship? How are we to conceive the Christian God?

---

11 op. cit., P. 10

12 op cit., P. 11

13 First Church Pulpit, Vol. II, No. 1, Sermon on "The Christian Idea of God" - October 24, 1937. P.P. 7, 8.

Recognizing the ease with which men have, in all ages, created God in their own image; reading into the Divine nature the malice, vanity and prejudice of mortal man; Dr. Tittle thinks that the greatest contribution the exponents of Christianity can bring to a confused age is a reaffirmation of the Christlike God.

In doing that, however, the Christian needs to guard against some false conceptions of God which sometimes masquerade as Christian. The Christian God "is not merely a name for all that is; the Universe spelled with a capital 'U'". The Christian God is also

> "No mere abstraction which philosophy may labor to present under such names as the Absolute, the Timeless, the Eternal, described with such awesome adjectives as omnicient, onmipotent, omnipresent - words which do indeed sound impressive, but which, after all, are meaningless or nearly so to any ordinary mind". Nor is God "an impersonal Trend or Process or Life-Urge which, more or less blindly, is turning out stars and systems and humen beings and the idealism of Christ".[14]

Like Niebuhr, Dr. Tittle believes in a God who is above and beyond the highest man can think. He is transcendent as any really great God would have to be. But there is a note of immanence in Tittle's conception of God which one misses in Niebuhr. The Christian God,

> "is that power, at once within and beyond nature and man, which is making for good - a power which is personal spirit.... who has purposes for which He cares and who can and does enter into fellowship with men".[15]

But that definition is too philosophical for Dr. Tittle. Christian faith maintains that "this personal spirit which is making for good" has revealed himself as Christlike in character. That is the

---

14
op. cit., PP. 7 and 8.
15
op. cit., P. 8.

central Christian conviction about God. In Christ we see the fulness of God's nature expressed in terms which man can understand.

It is at this point where Dr. Tittle breaks with the naturalistic humanism of so much liberal Christian thought. Revelation and the Incarnation are central to his whole approach to religion and life. In discussing the Christlikeness of God Dr. Tittle paints a picture which is bold and strong. He takes his departure from those two seemingly unrelated incidents in Jesus' last week: the cleansing of the Temple and the Last Supper. In the cleansing of the temple, the Christlike God reveals both his attitude toward the false gods of money, state, and power and his method of dealing with them. He rejects quite positively the inference that Jesus used the whip to do violence to the money-mad tradesmen of the temple. It is ridiculous to think that one man could have done that without encountering force in return. "What cleansed the temple was not physical force, but moral force amply supported by an informed and indignant public opinion".[16] The Christlike God is therefore.

> "One who will not tolerate unethical practices in business, industry, finance, politics, or anywhere else..... No individual nor society, may have security, enduring prosperity or lasting peace in a situation which makes mock of the justice and love of God as revealed in Christ".[17]

---

16 op. cit., P. 11

17 op. cit., P. 12

It is, however, in the foot-washing incident of the Last Supper that another side of the Christlike God is revealed. In that simple act of courtesy on Jesus' part he reveals the fact that "there is nothing within the realm of possibility that God will not do for us men - nothing, that is, in the way of our enduring welfare"[18]. Of course, when God granted man freedom he placed a self-limitation on what He could do. But though limited, God is not impotent. While He is "no Mussolini" over-riding the wills of men; "He can and does bring about situations in which people are compelled to think and to think far differently than before"[19]. The power of God is not a material force; but the power of Christ to appeal to the best in the human heart.

Let us turn now to the bearing of such a faith upon three fundamental institutions of human society: the home, the school, and the Church.

With prophetic insight he examines the modern home and finds it wanting in so far as its part in building spiritual and moral ideals is concerned[20]. "The place of all places where religion is got is the home". In spite of the disappearance of the old-time family altar, grace at table, and bible study within the home, religion is still being made in the home. Since "religion is a belief about the world and life..... a scale of value according to which some things are rated higher than others.... a faith as to what constitutes supreme value"[21], every home is giving its children some sort of religion whether it realizes it or not. It is being given "by what

---

18
op. cit., P. 13

19
loc. cit.,

20
First Church Pulpit, Vol. I., No. 8, Sermon on "Homemade Religion". May 9, 1937, P. 4.

21
op cit. P. 6

children see, by what they hear, and by the way they are made to feel".[22]

But the home is the center of religious life for another reason and that is the use Jesus made of family concepts in His whole message to men. "Christianity holds that all human life is meant to be a family affair".[23] For that reason Christianity needs the home even more than it does the Church. It needs the home to develope those attitudes toward persons, toward all conditions of men. Race, class, and religious prejudices can not be broken down unless they are first conquered in the home. Christianity also needs the home to establish that scale of values without which a better social and individual morality can not be secured. The canons of success, honesty, purity, patience, forgiveness are not established at all unless they are established in the homes of God's people. But, more than all else, it is in the home that the child gets his first and strongest conception of God.

> "One can not but wonder what some children think when they are bidden to pray:'Our Father who art in Heaven!'; knowing that their father on earth is a man who does not inspire affection or admiration or even trust".[24]

It is asking too much of children to expect them to believe in love, kindness, mercy, and the dauntless idealism of Jesus Christ unless they find those things in the home.

22
op. cit., P. 7
23
op.cit., P. 8-f.
24
op. cit., P. 11

Dr. Tittle has also worked out a Christian philosophy of education, as one might expect a prophet to do in a university town. He, of course, does not deem himself qualified to criticize or judge the rival theories of education which are disturbing the teachers of America. But he does dare to suggest that our whole educational system is geared to a static, peaceful world such as we knew before the war, and not to an age of swift change and transition. While recognizing the fact that imparting of knowledge must concern itself with the world of the past and the present; he insists however that mankind is not living in the fixed world such knowledge presupposes. Modern education must find a way to prepare the rising generation to meet with intelligence the unprecedented demands to be placed upon them by a changing world.[25]

In other words, we need an educational system which will train people to think. "That means that they must be permitted to reflect upon experience - their own and the world's".[26] He stresses that word "permitted" because it is becoming increasingly evident that American schools are not permitting access to certain facts which self-appointed guardians on school-boards and elsewhere deem to be "un-American". He insists that the only way for people to choose democracy as opposed to fascism and communism is for them to be given unbiased, factual information about these rival philosophies of government.

---

[25] See First Church Pulpit, Vol. I, No. 9, Sermon on "Education and Religion" Oct. 4, 1936, PP. 3 & 4.

[26] op. cit., P. 6

The second step in this thinking process is to permit people to evaluate the facts.[27] That means free and untrammeled discussion of every controversial issue before the American people.

If these first two steps in training people to think are permitted and encouraged, a third naturally follows: "they must be permitted to come to their own conclusions".

> "They can hardly be expected to think if they are given the answer to every question, the conclusion they must reach if they are to be thought intelligent or good or patriotic or pious".[28]

Now such an education depends most profoundly upon the Christian conception of life. While most undergraduates, teachers, and parents doubt that statement, there will come a time, not far distant, when they will be forced to the conclusion that at heart all human problems touch religious ground. He calls our attention to the fact that you can-not discuss any of the live political, social,and economic issues of our time without raising the fundamentally religious questions concerning the nature of reality, the meaning and the possibilities of life".[29] With penetrating insight, Dr. Tittle then discusses the anti-intellectual, de-humanizing, godless bases of the totalitarian state. If, as the Nazis maintain, the Christian God has no objective existence why of course man is the stupid, lusting, pugnacious creature he so often appears to be".[30] In other words,

---

27 op. cit., P. 7

28 op. cit., P. 8

29 op. cit., P. 10

30 op. cit., P. 11

the conclusions to which a thinking man comes are in themselves dependent upon the Christian world-view or they can not be sound, true, or just.

Finally, this great prophet sees, what many another prophet has not seen, that the Church has a vital function to perform in making the Christian God regnant in the lives of men and nations. He of course does not believe that the Church is the pulpit, although he has some rather pertinent (or are they impertinent?) remarks to say about an intelligent preacher's right, duty, and competence to discuss labor, war, unemployment,[31] and the distribution of wealth. He accepts the definition of the Church as given in the Articles of Religion as "a congregation of faithful men",[32] a group, in other words, which is committed to the Christian way of life. He is realist enough to know that the Church can not often speak with a single voice on controversial issues because of differences of opinion, and more important, because there are in the Church those who are not fully committed to the Christian way of life. But, for all that, the Church is an organized group of persons with definite ideas about life. Some one is always trying to say how the world should be run. Our age is full of "pressure groups" trying to tell how the world should be run. "Is it only the Church that has no right or duty to say how the world should be run?" More important still, must the Christian always seek to

> "shape the character of civilization only through organizations other than the Church, which are not committed to Christ's way of life? As members of political parties, chambers of commerce, and patriotic organizations, Christians feel free to pass on any question. Is it only as churchmen that they are bound to remain silent?" [33]

---

[31] See First Church, Pulpit, Vol. I., No. 2, Sermon on "The Church and Society" - Feb. 14, 1937. PP. 3, 4.

[32] Articles of Religion (Methodist) #13; Also Articles of Religion (Anglican) #19.

[33] op. cit., P. 6

Not on your life, thinks Dr. Tittle. "If the Church is here to save souls, it must undertake to put an end to war, for war is the ruination of souls".

"If the Church is here to save souls, it must do something about the totalitarian state", for it destroys the soul.

"If the Church is here to save souls, it must do all it can to create a social environment in which the odds against a Christian outlook on life are not as terrible as they are today".[34] The Church has words of life to utter to our dismayed world. It can say that men are God's children and precious in His sight. It can say that money is a means to a glorious end, rather than the root of all evil, for it can be used to enable men to make the most and best of themselves and to enjoy the beauty of life. Above all else, the Church can say that the true goal of all man's effort, the object of all history, and "the end toward which the whole creation moves" is the Kingdom of God - a Kingdom that overleaps all barriers of race, nationality, and class as it "seeks the welfare of all men the world around".[35]

---

[34] op. cit., PP. 8, 9, 10.

[35] op. cit., PP. 10, 11, 12.

I began this chapter with a personal word. May I end it thus? Two years ago I stopped off in Evanston and sought out Dr. Tittle in the offices of First Church. He took me through the immense parish house and school buildings and then into the new chapel which is a superb gem of gothic lovliness. I was, however, totally unprepared for what awaited me inside the Church which I had known so well in my seminary days. The bright windows were gone - replaced with gorgeous stained glass making it so dark that we had to turn on the lights. The pulpit and choir-loft of seventeen years ago were no more - and in their stead was a chancel of exquisite beauty, crowned by a carved-oak reredos imported from Europe.

Dr. Tittle sat down in the stall behind the pulpit, (now off at one side as pulpits should be!) and as the light fell on him I suddenly realized that he had grown old. Deep lines furrowed his face; and a great weariness shown in his eyes. Then, as I looked about me at all that lovliness speaking so eloquently of devotion to the Church - and of money, I felt that I knew why he had aged as he had. With some temerity I blurted out one question: "How have you managed to keep from letting all this ruin your prophetic zeal?" An understanding smile came over his tired face, and with his finger he pointed to the figure of the Crucified Christ on the reredos behind me. "I simply keep my eyes on that", he said, and rose to go.

The way of a prophet in a church like that is hard. It is and must be the Way of the Cross. But Dr. Tittle has neither run away from it nor succumbed to it. Furthermore, he has refused to be swept into that pessimism concerning the effectiveness of preaching which so many disillussioned liberals have come to feel. While speaking fearlessly to the sins of man and society, he has not for one moment relinquished his convinction that human nature can be changed and converted to the better Way. He has paid dearly for that faith. But the liberal in him still lives - and also the prophet.

CHAPTER V.

ANGLICANISM: EDWARD L. PARSONS

Chapter V.

ANGLICANISM: EDWARD L. PARSONS

The evils of the world in which modern man is forced to live his life have been revealed with increasing clearness as this study has progressed. Materialism, nationalism, practical atheism and their attendant collapse of moral and spiritual ideals have been thrown in sharp and lurid outline against the background of the ethical demands and spiritual insights of a high religion.

While these major sins of contemporary life are the sins of persons, they express themselves concretely in the corporate life of man. They illustrate most vividly the truth that just because no man lives or dies unto himself neither does he sin unto himself. We do not do evil in a vacuum. Nor is it alone in regard to the consequences of sin that our eyes are directed toward man's social life; it is in the fact of sin itself, and in the act of sinning that modern man becomes one of a group. Increasingly the individual who seeks after righteousness is finding it difficult to come anywhere near his goal because the society of which he is a part does not seek after righteousness. That has always been true; but never more so than today. As one of our prophets has implied, modern man finds himself caught in the grip of an immoral society.[1]

Because of the corporate nature of present-day sin it is becoming increasingly evident to those who would do something about it, that the

---

[1] Reference to Niebuhr: Moral Man and Immoral Society.

only effective means by which corporate sin can be dealt with is through corporate righteousness. The ancient prophets recognized that necessity when they strove to make Israel as a nation a holy people. The modern prophet recognizes that same necessity when he places so great an emphasis upon the effort to make the Church that corporate arm of the Lord. Every-one of those whom we have studied gives some attention to the importance of the Church, not excepting Dr. Niebuhr. They may blast away at the sins of the Church and of church-people but nowhere is there the slightest doubt but that the Church is intended to be and may be the instrument of salvation to a distrought age.

The tragedy is that there is no such corporate entity as"the Church". The traditional Protestant emphasis upon the spiritual conception of the Church as composed of all those who believe on the Lord Jesus is not concrete enough to meet such concrete realities as the deified state. It is more like a disembodied spirit. But where is "the Church"? Is it what Msgr. Ryan thinks it is? Or Rabbi Silver? or Dr. Tittle?

Thus we come to the inevitable conclusion that the chief thing which hinders this corporate expression of Christian morality and spiritual-ity is nothing less than the fundamental disunity of Christendon. It is indeed a tragedy that all these voices and others like them should be raised in such unity of convinction and conclusion only to have them echo back from some denominational wall instead of becoming parts of a mighty chorus sing-ing "the song of Moses and the Lamb" to an age which follows after Mars and the Golden Calf. Therefore, we can not finish with the sins of the modern

world until we have considered the chief sin of the one potential corporate entity that holds the key to that world's salvation. I refer to the disunity of the Church. "We would reconcile men to God and we are not reconciled one to another. We would bring the world into the commonwealth of love, and, alas, we have not ourselves found it".[2]

The man who uttered those words is the Rt. Rev. Edward L. Parsons, Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of California. Perhaps no one in America is better qualified to say that than he. For over forty-five years, in parish ministry and in the Episcopate, Bishop Parsons has held before himself and his people the positive ideal which lies behind these negative words. In recent years, following the death of that Apostle of Unity, Charles Henry Brent, Dr. Parsons has been forced by that life long interest, by his vision, and statemanship, and by the insistence of others into a leadership in the cause of Church Unity which is recognized in his own communion and in others throughout the world as unequaled by any other living man. As chairman of important unity committees for the Episcopal Church and the Lambeth Conference he is hard at work implementing the great message he has been proclaiming through the years. And if some fuller measure of unity comes in our times, it will come through leadership such as his.

Bishop Parson's interest in unity, as the words quoted above would indicate, has arisen out of another life-long passion for the

---

[2] Parsons: "The Ministry of Reconciliation" Sermon at 52nd General Convention - October 1937. P. 10.

Christianizing of the social order. With prophetic insight and courage he has dared to insist through the years that it is the Church's business to proclaim the relevancy of the Gospel to the evils of man's economic, political, and social life. That insistence has brought down the wrath of the powers that be both in his own community and elsewhere, as he has espoused unpopular causes and expressed unpopular opinions. Sometimes it has almost seemed that he was "a prophet without honor in his own country". But no one familiar with his message and spirit has ever been able to detect any other motive than that laid upon every minister of Jesus Christ: the reconciliation of a lost world to the Master.

In these matters he has been a realist but no cynic; a prophet but no reformer; a convictor of sin, but never bitter against the sinner. Above all else, he has conceived of this task as the task of the whole Church, not of isolated and lonely prophets. Nor has he been satisfied to consider his own branch of the Church to be "the whole Church".

> "No preaching of the Gospel, no Christianizing of the social order, can be made effective until the witness of the Church is one witness and men know that God is love ..... just because of the simple fact that Christians love one another".[3]

This then is the reason for the Bishop's emphasis upon unity. The Christian forces of the world can not reconcile the world to Christ unless they act together. A chaotic and divided generation can not be saved by a divided Church.

3
op. cit., P. 11.

Like many another Anglican, Bishop Parson's conceives the unique mission of his Church to be the affording of a via media, a bridge between Protestantism and Catholicism. He conceives of the Episcopal Church as being Protestant

> "Not only in its appeal to the scriptures, in its stress upon personal freedom and the right of private judgment and its belief in the priest-hood of all believers, but also in sharing the attitude toward the world and life which was born at the Reformation".[4]

The Bishop's protestantism is not founded upon sentiment alone. It rests upon his unwavering belief in the freedom and democracy which the Reformation engendered.

But the Protestantism of Anglican faith is set in a truly Catholic environment. The Anglican Church is Catholic:

> "In its reverence for tradtion; its sense of the unbroken continuity of the Church; its stress upon the sacramental aspect of tradition and the historic creeds; its passion for great and beautiful liturgical development. 'The Anglican of whatever churchmanship believes that' as Christian is a bigger term than Catholic, so Catholic is a bigger term than Protestant".[5]

The realist in him, however, makes it quite clear that there are aspects in each tradition which the Episcopal Church can not accept. Extreme congregationalism on the one hand, and extreme autocracy and absolutism on the other are not part of Anglican tradition. Furthermore, he quite candidly admits that the chances of unity with evangelical Protestantism are infinitely greater than the present chances of unity with Rome.

---

4 Convention Address - Journal of the Diocese of California, 1930, P. 58.

5 Op. cit., P. 58. Also see the Atlantic Monthly, March 1935, Parsons: "Protestant/Catholic? P. 269, for a clear and complete discussion of the two-fold aspect of Anglicanism.

But always there must be the effort on the part of the Anglican Church to move on both fronts at every opportunity.

In pressing action on both fronts, he outlines at least three important steps which his fellow-Episcopalians must take.

First, they must seek and accept every opportunity to work and live and talk with their brothers of other churches. While he is a great believer in conferences with other communions, he insists that Episcopalians must also work and live with these others. For that reason, he looks with sadness upon the failure of his Church to join the Federal Council, and is still persistently agitating for such action. He is an ardent supporter of local Federations and comity arrangements with other communions. While entertaining no illusions as to the amount of actual "Kingdom building" accomplished by such Federations, he does believe that they are of value if for no other reason than the breaking down of prejudice.[6] In addition to such united effort, he has interpreted the rubrics of the Prayer Book[7] in such a way as to welcome to the communion in Episcopal Churches members of other churches, thus enabling certain churches in his Diocese to be community churches in fact as well as in name.[8] Also, in the councils of the Anglican Church at home and abroad he has lead in the

---

6 See address to California State Federation - 1933 (mimeographed) P. 2

7 Book of Common Prayer, P. 299.

8 St. Francis Church, San Francisco and St. John's Church, Ross, are the best-known examples.

effort to secure approval of such concrete steps to unity as the South India Plan and the proposed concordat with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., now under widespread discussion.

The second step his Church must take toward unity is to have that attitude of mind which recognizes the complete equality of all Christians in the sight of God.

> "It is hard to imagine that God runs a hard and fast line down through the toiling millions of his people and says to those on one side, 'you are in' and to the others 'you are out' .....If our fellowship is patronizing, if our conference" (with others) "is merely the exposition of what we believe is complete and settled forever, the whole spirit of fellowship and conference is gone. Whatever inequalities there may be, there must be equality in readiness to learn as well as to teach". [9]

It is the absence of this attitude in certain quarters of his own Communion and more particularly in the Roman Church which constitutes the chief barrier to unity from the Catholic side. In a book-review quoted in a Franciscan magazine, (of all places!), he quite bluntly states that unity with Rome at the present time is out of the question because

> "the Roman conception of unity proceeds from the basic principal of obedience, not of good-will. It asks submission, not co-operative thinking ..... The Kingdom of God is the family of God, bound together by the good-will growing out of the common Fatherhood..... The Lausanne Conference revealed with utter clearness that not upon submission and obedience, but upon co-operative good-will, the unity of the future must be based." [10]

9
Convention Address - Journal of the Diocese of California, 1930. ..

10
The Antidote, Vol. XII, No. 4, April 1930. Parsons:"Rome and Reunion - Some Reflections", P. 78.

To Roman and Anglo-Catholic alike he points out the obvious fact that co-operative good-will can exist only among equals. It can not exist when one feels superior to the other.

The third thing the Anglican must do is to get clearly before him the contribution his Church can make to the reunion of Christendon. In other words, he must discover what it is in the genius of Anglicanism that makes it "the bridge Church". This resolves itself into a quest for a principle of unity.

> "Neither an infallible Pope nor the decrees of the General Councils gives us that principle. Neither the unhistorical doctrinarism of the Middle Ages, nor the unhistorical pragmatism of the Middle West can integrate the multifarious outcroppings of the life of Christ".[11]

Rather, the Anglican Church has found that essential principle in "the subordination of doctrine and the primacy of life and worship".[12] The Anglican Church thinks of itself as a family, as a nation rather than a political party, as the Home of Christian people. In such a fellowship it is not expected that all shall think alike. His Communion has somehow stumbled upon the fact that a common experience in life and worship is a more fundamental and important thing than rationalizing that experience in doctrine. "We live before we philosophize. The Church lives before it dogmatizes".[13] In other words, "in the Christian life love stands above truth. It is more important that Christians

---

11 Convention Address - Journal of the Diocese of California, 1930, P. 63.

12 loc. cit., P. 63

13 op. cit., P. 64

love one another than that they think alike or even think aright".[14] It is obvious to anyone familiar with the wide variations in faith and practice within the Anglican communion, that this is an accurate picture of her life and genius. And it is equally obvious that the same principle of integration at the level of experience must be the ground for the united Church that is to be.

> "When men learn to live and worship together the factors which divide somehow cease to be so decisive. Doctrines take their place as part of the rich diversity of ..... the Church. The sectarian view can never see the Church other than as a body in which men all think alike or act alike or feel alike. It is exclusive ..... (On the other hand) the Holy Catholic Church throughout the world is not a sect. It includes all the manifold types of love, all the innumerable flowers of devotion, all the infinitely varied glimpes of the eternal truth of God which are discovered as men come into union with Christ".[15]

This is the crux of the whole matter to Bishop Parsons. It is the sectarian spirit as evidenced by Protestant and Catholic alike which thwarts the move toward unity. As that spirit has been resolved quite remarkably within the Episcopal Church, therefore the chief contribution she can make to the cause of a united Church is the result of her experience at this point. She can be "the bridge" for others because she has used the bridge within her own fellowship. For that reason, the Anglican advocate of unity must experiment in every legitmate way with the possibilities of fellowship in work and worship with others. The great communion service at Oxford, the many services and meetings for prayer and conference

---

14
loc. cit., P. 64.

15
Parsons: Church or Sect - a pamphlet in Faith and Life Series, No. IX, P.P. 11, 12.

now going on with the Presbyterians are significant steps in that direction. Additional ones must be taken.

This, by any legitmate standard, represents a truly Catholic point of view. And in yet another sense the Bishop is interested in developing the Catholic point of view. As we saw in our study of the work of Monsignor Ryan, the Roman Catholic Church has always assumed responsibility for the social order. In that respect she has been truly Catholic. A united Church must also be truly Catholic in that sense. While the individual Protestant evangelical has often sought after social reform[16] the ethics of Protestantism have been largely individualistic. The claim of the Oxford Group that "changed men will change the world"[17] is only half true. As we saw earlier in this chapter, a morally righteous man has a difficult time of it in an immoral society. For that reason

> "it is the business of the Church to do what it can to reveal a commonwealth of love to the pagan world; and to strive mightily to change the social order so that the primacy of personality may be secured".[18]

To do that, the Church will not only have to be united, but it will have to recognize the sacramental principle of Catholic faith which "insists that we can not altogether save men unless we save the physical conditions of their lives".[19]

---

16 Such as Wesley, Shaftebury, Garrison, etc.,

17 See page 70 - footnote 1.

18 Liberal Evangelical Pamphlets No. 2., Parsons: "The Liberal Evangelicals Message in our Church today", P. 15.

19 op. cit., P. 14.

It is only the sacramental nature of the Church's life which can make of it a concrete, corporate entity capable of doing such a job. The Church itself is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace". The Christian needs to be reminded constantly that "although it is the mystical body of Christ, it is nevertheless no mysterious entity which can carry out God's purpose in some strange fashion irrespective of the people who make up its membership".[20]

Thus the whole thing comes back, as the prophetic message always does, to the responsibility of the individual for the effectiveness of the Church's witness and fulfillment of her mission to the world. The barriers to progress toward unity are not impersonal; they lurk within the individual soul. "It is only those who are thinking of the institution or of their own small garden plot who talk about saving the Church".[21] There is considerable panic among church people today. They wonder what can be done to save the Church, but usually they are thinking not of the whole Church but of their own little segment of it.

The Church of Christ will be saved, as every individual is saved, by losing itself in saving a lost world. The churches of Christ will save themselves only by losing their tiny, partial, segmented identity in The Church that is to be. The two go together.

> "Once we are concerned with bringing men to God and God to men, we will never be troubled by unworthy fears, by temporal and transient worries. The eternal is ours. The future is ours. For both belong to God in Jesus Christ".[22]

---

[20] General Convention Address - Parsons: The Ministry of Reconciliation, p. 1.

[21] Convention Address - Journal of the Diocese of California, 1937, p. 68

[22] op. cit., p. 68.

It seems only logical that we should conclude our study of these modern prophets with the message of one who gathers up within his mind and soul everything of value in the others. I have purposely omitted every other element in the prophetic word of Bishop Parsons save that on unity. I have done this because it has seem increasingly clear to me in the pursuit of my task, that everything with which modern prophecy is concerned leads at last to a consideration of the nature and function of the Christian Church. We are living in a social age. All our problems must be faced on that level. There may have been, and there may be again, times when the lonely figure of the prophet is God's most effective way of speaking His Word to men. But that time is not now. Only an effective corporate action, belief, and life can fulfill that mission today.

Bishop Parsons sees that as clearly as any living prophet. He has given a long and fruitful ministry to the task of building such a Christian society. And when the Great Church comes, as come it must and will, it will come along the lines of his message.

PART III: CONCLUSION

THE CHARACTER OF MODERN PROPHECY

PART III: CONCLUSION

THE CHARACTER OF MODERN PREACHING

Our study has, I trust, intensified the common observation that the age in which we are living presents a confused and bewildering face to the sons of men. A constant state of change and insecurity has destroyed the confidence and the happiness of the race.

The reasons for this present unhappy state of the world, would seem to lie, for each of these modern preachers, in the false assumptions of the Age which began with the Renaissance, continued through the Reformation and the rise of the democratic state, and finally burned itself out in the Great War and its aftermath. Those false assumptions would seem to be: 1. The belief that man can work out his own salvation without benefit of God. 2. The belief in Reason as the all-sufficient ruler of man's destiny. 3. The belief in unending progress. These assumptions are false from the standpoint of a high, ethical religion both because of what they rule out, and because of what they include. In ruling out God the modern has lost at once the source of all Reason and the check upon the presumptions of Reason which religious faith alone can give. In ruling out God, modern man has locked the door and lost the key to history; leaving him stranded in a false self-sufficiency and in a false sense of security against the tragedies of history.

In ruling out God, he has lost the one integrating factor in human life which safe-guards him against the tendency to divide his corporate existence by all the cruel barriers of race, class and nation.

On the other hand, by trusting in his own intelligence to rule his destiny he has ignored that whole side of his nature which we call emotion and will. It is a truism of psychology that Reason is powerless to dominate man's life at the emotional level and to direct his will, unless his emotions are themselves integrated around some compelling loyalty outside himself. While recognizing that as a general principle, man has rejected it as a specific fact so far as religion is concerned. But the powerlessness of Reason is at long last demonstrating itself in the modern's terrible eagerness to give his loyalty at the emotional level to the Strong Men who dominate the contemporary scene.

Further, by his belief in unending and inevitable progress man has blinded himself to the oft-revealed fact of history that he is never more insecure than when he thinks he is secure; and never more prone to be dragged downwards and backwards then at the moment when he comes proud of his success. The theologian calls this downward and backward pull "original sin". Whatever its name may be, it is a fact which has an uncomfortable way of turning up just often enough to remind us that we are not "sufficient of ourselves to help ourselves".

In other words, the crux of modern apostacy is discovered to be at the point of man's belief. Recent history has proven quite tragically that it does make a difference what man believes; and that he can not live a good life apart from good beliefs. For that reason, all of these

modern preachers under survey are devoting a much greater proportion of their thought to a re-affirmation of the doctrinal basis of an ethical faith, than was the case a decade ago. Even in the one instance where I have gone outside the Christian tradition, we find Rabbi Silver directing his attention to the fact that a high morality on the part of Israel or any other people finds no authentic basis apart from faith in a moral God. A mere code of ethics for the individual or for society is not enough. Behind any code must be the God who is the ground for man' s conviction as to the code's validity. And, above all codes, with their necessarily limited point of view, are the eternal principles of justice, mercy and truth.

The earlier preachers of the social gospel sometimes forgot these facts; but these do not. Therefore, there is in the message of each a doctrinal note which marks one of the distinguishing characteristics of contemporary preaching. The historic creeds which were wont to be tolerated or explained away only a few years ago receive a new emphasis. The failures of modern man are seen to be inextricably bound up in their message with a re-affirmation of religion's belief about God, Man, Sin, the Person of Christ, the meaning of Redemption, and the Kingdom of God. There is a "plus" which has been added to the familiar social gospel and that "plus" is the belief upon which the gospel rests.

Since the modern world is tending more and more to stifle and destroy the personalities of men, there is a new emphasis put upon the Personality of God as well as upon Jesus' teachings concerning the worth of the individual. Since the modern is disappointed in his late optimism concerning inevitable progress and wonders why it was an illusion, the much-despised idea of Original Sin is dug out of the closet where it

was consigned a generation or more ago and given a new pertinance to the current woes of man. Since the seeming defeat of righteousness at the hands of evil is the most obvious fact of our times, the Cross gains a deeper significance. Since the corporate nature of sin stands forth as a stark reality, a new meaning is found in that ideal of corporate righteousness which is the Church. And more than all else, since man's worship of himself has brought him to his present sorry plight, revealing the relativities of all his self-centered quest for peace and security, there is a major emphasis upon a conception of God as more than "the sum total of social values", more even than the universe He has made; and whose purpose is the redemption of man's earthly life from the evils attendant upon his recent false assumptions that man was the center of the universe.

The second characteristic of these modern prophets is their development of a religious philosophy of history which, if not exactly new, is somewhat unfamiliar to the mind of the present era. This philosophy of history is that of the Bible, in which, from Genesis to Revelation, the determining factor in the course of human events is God, and man's response or lack of response to His will. God is not a factor in the other philosophies of history current to-day. History, we have been told is "the survival of the fittest"; or it is determined by economic needs, political and cultural necessity, or the clash of races. The most popular philosophy, borrowed from communism, combines economic determinism and the struggle between classes or peoples for economic power. Consequently we hear a great deal about the "haves" and "have nots", and other pat expressions which have seeped into modern thought from the

philosophy of economic determinism.

While recognizing that there is a deal of evidence to support such a conception of history, these preachers under consideration take their stand squarely upon that philosophy of Divine Determinism which is the philosophy of the Bible. On that basis they feel called upon to hold up to searching scrutiny all philosophies and all economic and political systems. Niebuhr, Tittle, and Parsons, for example, have probably espoused socialism as their political or economic faith at one time in their lives, but there is no indication that any of them believes that socialism is the last word, or divinely inspired, or capable of succeeding unless the men who live under such a system are imbued with the spirit of Christ. Therefore, the materialism of capitalism and communism alike come up for scathing criticism. The emphasis upon the "economic man" which is so common today is a false emphasis. With one accord, these preachers hold to the conviction that man was not born to be at the mercy of economic necessity, or a mere pawn of political expediency as revealed in the deified State. Man was born to be a son of God.

This theistic philosophy of history runs counter to current thought at another point. It insists that the rise and fall of nations and cultures since the beginning of history can be determined solely by moral and spiritual factors. Israel lost her identity as a nation, not only because of her unfortunate position on the land bridge between Asia and Africa, but because she played fast and loose with the moral law. Greece did not collapse because of Rome's greater might. Her decay had begun long before, because her beauty, culture, art, and philosophy were founded upon an enslaved populace and a morally debilitated aristocracy. Rome did not collapse before the superior numbers of the barbarian in-

vaders. She fell because at the moment of her greatest strength she rested back in a false sense of security which softened her moral fibre and made her the victim of vice, luxury, and oppression. The same holds true of modern nations and cultures. Neither man nor society can break the moral law with impunity.

One interesting characteristic of these five men remains to be considered briefly. They have been nurtured in the very tradition of liberalism which, in the main, they now feel called upon to attack. (Even Monsignor Ryan is in the liberal wing-for such there is- of Roman Catholicism.) With the possible exception of Monsignor Ryan, none of them comes from a conservative, fundamentalist background. In fact, no significant critic of the social order which produced liberal religion does come from such a source. Of course that has always been true. Jesus, the critic of Judaism, was a Jew. Luther, the critic of Rome, was an Augustinian monk. Wesley, the critic of the arid Anglicanism of the 18th Century was a priest in that Church. The real critic must always be a product of the thing which he criticizes. Only he can see the short-comings because he has seen them from the inside. Only he can know whereof he speaks.

But, not all of the liberal back-ground was false, nor has it all been repudiated by these men. Their social passion is a product of liberal religion. The intelligence with which they approach their prophetic task came from liberalism. The note of Hope which, even in the most pessimistic utterances of Niebuhr still shines through the gloom, is a note sounded by liberal religion. The freshness of insight, independence of judgment, and absence of doctrinaire dogmatism are products

of the liberal tradition. Liberalism as a faith may be dead, but liberalism as a technique and a spirit is quite definitely alive.

So beneath the concern of these men with Sin there shines the Hope which the free spirit in every age can not relinquish. Out of the confusion of our times, one catches in their message the deep conviction that God is not dead, nor impotent, nor even thoroughly disgusted with mortal man. "He remembers that we are but dust," but it is a holy dust into which He would breathe once again the breath of life. I can think of no better words with which to conclude than these of another modern prophet who seems to sum it all up for us, thus:

> At times I think I can see the hand of God on man's shoulder urging him on, and saying, "You are going through to international brotherhood and peace and to a more decent social order. Move!" And man says, "I will not." He digs in his heels. He is vexed at change. "Nevertheless", says God, "you will." "You will face constantly more complicated international relationships until you have to. Every other road you try to take will be blocked. You will go through on my road." But all man's selfishness and stupidity rise up against that. "I will have my way," he says, "I will have my prejudices and hatreds. I will not go."
>
> "Nevertheless," says God, "you will. You have already come a long way since I started you. You have said you would not overpass tribalism, or feudalism, or slavery, or judicial torture, but you did. Every time I found a seer to see my way, you have said "No!", but you came. I have carried you along ever since time began, and you are going further than you have dreamed. 1

THE END

---

1 Harry Emerson Fosdick. quoted in The Churchman Red and Gold Calendar, 1939, p.52

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BROOKS, PHILLIPS. *Lectures on Preaching*. New York; E. P. Dutton and Co., 1877.

FOSDICK, HARRY EMERSON. "Pre-destination" Quoted in *The Churchman Red and Gold Calendar* 1939, P. 52.

NIEBUHR, REINHOLD. *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*: Chicago: Willett, Clark and Colby 1929.

NIEBUHR, REINHOLD. *Reflections on the End of an Era*. New York Charles Scribner's Sons. 1934.

NIEBUHR, REINHOLD. *Beyond Tragedy* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937.

PARSONS, EDWARD L. Address to 80th Convention of the Diocese of California. *Journal of the 80th Convention of the Diocese of California* (1930) [illegible].

PARSONS, EDWARD L. "Rome and Reunion: Some Reflections" *The Antidote* Peekskill XII, 4 (1930) 78-80.

PARSONS, EDWARD L. Address to California State Federation of Churches (Mimeographed) 1933.

PARSONS, EDWARD L. "Protestant or Catholic?" *The Atlantic Monthly*. Vol. 155, No. 3 (1935) [illegible].

PARSONS, EDWARD L. Address to 87th Convention of the Diocese of California. *Journal of the 87th Convention of the Diocese of California* (1937) 67, 68.

PARSONS, EDWARD L. "The Ministry of Reconciliation". Sermon preached at 52nd Triennial Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church. A Liberal Evangelical Pamphlet. October 1937.

PARSONS, EDWARD L. "Church or Sect" Faith and Life Series, No. IX. Edited by a group of graduates of the Episcopal Theological School, Cambridge (No date given)

PARSONS, EDWARD L. "The Liberal Evangelical's Message in Our Church Today". Liberal Evangelical Pamphlets No. 2 (no date given).

PRATT, JAMES BISSETT The Religious Consciousness. New York The Macmillan Company, 1921.

RYAN, JOHN A. The Catholic Church and the Citizen. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1928

RYAN, JOHN A. "International Ethics" Report of the Ethics Committee(second edition). Catholic Association for International Peace. 1928

RYAN, JOHN A. Distributive Justice. New York The Macmillan Company. 1935.

SILVER, ABBA HILLEL The Democratic Impulse in Jewish History New York: Bloch Publishing Company.1928.

SILVER, ABBA HILLEL Religion in a Changing World. New York Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930.

SPERRY, WILLARD L. We Prophesy in Part Lyman Beecher Lectures, Yale Divinity School, 1938. New York. Harper and Bros. 1938.

TITTLE, ERNEST FREMONT "What is your God?" Sermon delivered February 7, 1937. The First Church Pulpit. Evanston. I, 1.

TITTLE, ERNEST FREMONT "The Church and Society". Sermon delivered February 14, 1937. The First Church Pulpit. Evanston I, 2.

TITTLE, ERNEST FREMONT "Homemade Religion". Sermon delivered May 9, 1937. The First Church Pulpit Evanston, I, 8.

TITTLE, ERNEST FREMONT — "Education and Religion". Sermon delivered October 4, 1936. The First Church Pulpit. Evanston, I, 9.

TITTLE, ERNEST FREMONT — "The Christian Idea of God." Sermon delivered October 24, 1937. The First Church Pulpit. Evanston, II, 1.

GTU Library
3 2400 00687 0434

Date Due

MAR 31 1941			
JAN 5 - 1942			
APR 10 1943 Braun			